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The Dynamics of US Foreign Policy: Exceptionalism and Providentialism

Abstract: *This chapter follows the same structure as Chapter 2, with an overview of US foreign policy regarding Europe, France, NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and the Middle East from the end of World War II to the present. Following this is presented an analysis of concrete cases (such as the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts), describing various approaches employed by the United States to address international issues, and the perceptions and opinions of US political leaders, with particular emphasis on the 1980s to the present. There is overall agreement on the continuity of the major directions of US foreign policy from the 1950s to the present. However, there are some differences with regard to what should be the approach to reach the main objectives of US foreign policy. The interviews and documents show agreement among the a large majority of the Republican Party, but the Democratic Party is more divided on the specific approaches to deal with US intervention in the world.*

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Despite US foreign policy being marked by a certain conflict between idealism and realism, most scholars and politicians interviewed in this research are in agreement that there is a consensus on the general overarching approach to Foreign policy. All interviewees agreed that US foreign policy has remained an area of relative stability since the 1950s to the present. The following quotes reflect these views:

> The American national interest remains the same from the 50s or more to the present. We want an open trading system, an open economy. We want to promote universal values both at home and abroad. (D–senior advisor)
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> Even though there have not been radical changes in our foreign policy, over time we came up with a variety of approaches to address and adapt to the problems at hand. However, the fundamental interests remain the same. (Foreign affairs specialist–think-tank)
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> US Foreign policy has been basically the same, independently of who was in power: Democrats or Republicans. The only difference would be that there might have been more emphasis during the Bush administration in the last decade in a push for democracy in certain countries. (R–Senator)

The most widespread opinion is that the international order is in the US interest, and, even though there is awareness among political leaders that the political environment has changed drastically in the last 50 years, there is a consensus among the politicians interviewed from both American political parties that the United States "should find the way to remain the main actor and main power in the international arena" (R–Rep.). This way of looking at the role of the United States in the world by most US leaders as a necessary aspect of US foreign policy is interpreted by critics, scholars, and some leaders of foreign governments as "neo-imperialist" thinking.

In the 1980s, with the coming to power of Ronald Reagan (and what was called the conservative revolution) there was a slight shift in the practice of foreign policy, as it became more aggressive towards the Soviet Union than it had been in the previous two decades (see, for instance, what was called the "Star Wars" project, the Strategic Defense Initiative—SDI) and towards governments considered "sympathizers" of communism. The Reagan administration deviated from the detente approach that had begun with Richard Nixon and followed by Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, but it did not abandon completely negotiations with the Soviet Union, especially after Gorbachev came to power in that country. The Reagan era was marked by an enormous increase in military spending and large deficits, as well as direct and indirect interventions in

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Latin America (El Salvador, Grenada, Nicaragua) and the Middle East (Lebanon) and North Africa (Libya). The election of Ronald Reagan was, however, a reflection of the change in the country towards a more conservative ideology, which is still present today. Both political parties became, little by little, more conservative; the Republican Party became more right-wing and the Democratic Party moved to the center-right. In fact, in many aspects Reagan today would sound like a Democrat.

George H.W. Bush, also a Republican, was elected president after Reagan. According to the White House statement, he wanted to direct American values toward making the United States "a kinder and gentler nation." In his inaugural address in 1989 he pledged to use "American strength as a force for good" (White House 2013). His foreign policy was characterized by: the first invasion of Iraq to force Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait; the invasion of Panama to remove Manuel Noriega from power; the military intervention in Somalia; the signing of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with the Soviet Union; and the initiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement with Canada and Mexico. Certainly, the military interventions do not contribute to an image of the United States as "a kinder and gentler nation." Bush ran for a second term, but was beaten by William "Bill" Clinton, who ran under the banner of a new Democrat, which in fact meant a more conservative Democrat. Clinton's government intervened in the Bosnian conflict together with NATO and advocated for the inclusion in NATO of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. Also, after two years, Clinton decided to repatriate the troops his predecessor, Bush, had sent to Somalia, and he pushed the dictator of Haiti, Raoul Cédras, to relinquish power (by threatening to invade the country) and allow the return of democratically elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The Clinton administration developed the so-called "doctrine of enlargement," which was based on the idea of expanding the market democracies around the world, along with multilateralism and international alliances. The Clinton vision was that "the United States must continue its role as the principal leader of the world in promoting human dignity and democracy, with the understanding that it must never act in isolation or overextend its reach" (Miller Center 2013). Clinton pushed through Congress the North American Free Trade Agreement initiated by his predecessor and was able to influence a major revision of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. He was less involved in foreign wars than any other president since the 1980s, and many of his actions in foreign affairs were directed

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towards economic agreements. He also supported the Kyoto protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which set binding obligations to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.

The president after Clinton was George W. Bush, who was heavily influenced by the neoconservatives and who advocated unilateralism in foreign affairs. Bush withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia and rejected the Kyoto Protocol signed by his predecessor (but never ratified by Congress). The neoconservatives in power developed the doctrine of preventive war, which allowed the United States to intervene and depose foreign regimes that were perceived as a possible threat to the United States, even if that threat was not imminent. It also implied a unilateral policy in the Middle East and elsewhere and the promotion of democracy to combat terrorism, using military means if necessary. Bush had to face the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on US soil, and he responded with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (which will be discussed further below).

In November 2008, Barack Obama, the first black president was elected. After almost five years of war and some scandals related to the US military and the Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba, as well as growing US economic deficits, a majority of the population wanted to change the direction of the country. Obama promised that he would withdraw from both Iraq and Afghanistan, bring peace to those countries, and change the direction of foreign policy to return to the multilateralism and economic growth of the Clinton years. The Obama administration prioritized what has been called economics statecraft as a means to maintain U.S leadership in the world: pushing for free-trade agreements with certain countries of the Asia-Pacific and with the European Union. But, also, beyond economic support, the Obama administration was philosophically more willing to work multilaterally than was the previous administration of George W. Bush, as expressed in the following statement from a US official regarding relations with Europe:

> It is in our interest to have an international order, which includes an agreement with as many countries as possible on issues of security and this implies particularly to have excellent relations with our allies from Europe, including France of course.

The key elements of Obama's views on US foreign policy include the use of what is characterized as "smart power," that is, the full range of tools at US disposal: diplomatic, military, economic, cultural, political, and legal.

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This was a departure from the aggressive, unilateral, and war-oriented foreign policy of the administration of George W. Bush, but it was not as new as it sounded. Indeed, the United States has been using these tools (which some characterize as neo-imperialist) since the 1950s, with more or less intensity. The Obama administration has attempted to rebuild strong relationships with other countries, in particular Western Europe, but it has also turned its attention to Asia and the Pacific, increasing the US military presence in Australia, for example. In practice, Obama's foreign policy is certainly more multilateralist than the previous administration. In recent interventions in Libya, the Obama administration has been attentive to integrate not just the Europeans, but especially the Arab League and the United Nations, in order to limit the traditional accusation of a war waged by the West against the others. In this particular case, the United States let the United Kingdom and France lead, even thought the Americans provided strong military support. However, President Obama does not shy away from using force and going it alone if necessary. As this book goes to press, Obama is considering intervening in the Syrian civil war without the support of the United Nations. Furthermore, during his administration the use of drones to assassinate perceived enemies has become a key instrument of antiterrorism efforts, and is part of what Obama calls twenty-first-century military strategy. Essentially the US government under Obama "is relying much more upon intelligence services, and cooperation with other countries all over the world, to find out threats to our security or the security of those countries from terrorists or people who are prepared to use violence to advance their interests" (former US official). Militarily speaking, the tendency is to have smaller armed units, called Special Forces, relying more on technological advances, especially with the use of drone aircraft, and satellites, to locate and ultimately eliminate enemies instead of sending troops or using a large military infrastructure. Indeed, the US Special Forces have grown exponentially in the last decade, from 37,000 in 2001 to 64,000 in 2012 and it is expected that these units will number 72,000 in 2017 (De Hoop Sheffer 2013).

In other words, the United States will no longer use large numbers of troops for military intervention. The idea is to have a much more mobile military system of response, based in the Middle East, in other parts of Asia and other countries and supported by the US naval fleet, which has the power to be everywhere. All of this will be reinforced by a better use of the US media and social media: "We will inundate people who

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still have dictatorships or authoritarian governments with the US message. In that way we will try to transmit our message of hope, idealism, or at least some news of what is occurring in the world outside of that country" (R–Senator).

As we have seen, the key issue of promoting the perceived interest of the United States all over the world remains the same, but the tactics and strategies certainly vary somewhat. Even though there seems to be a consensus in foreign policy, one has to keep in mind that specific situations will prompt different responses and require adaptations. And, indeed, there are some differences from one president to the other. For instance, a president who was not influenced by the neoconservatives would not have invaded Iraq. Also, we have seen some difference between the Clinton administration and both Bush administrations regarding the commitment of troops to invading foreign countries.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that not everyone in the United States political elite agrees with the vision of the United States as dominating the world. A minority of diverging views on foreign policy in the United States have been expressed during the interviews by a strong criticism of US foreign policy in the past and in the present. The key elements of this criticism concern the tendency of the United States to use military power too often to address world problems; this is particularly true of the unilateral policies of the George W. Bush administration, but also true of previous administrations in the 1960s and 1980s: "The US is relying too much on its military power and should have a different approach in foreign policy, and listen more to our allies from Europe and elsewhere" (D–Rep.). This minority expected that a new comprehensive engagement with allies and enemies, which Obama suggested, would definitely shift the foreign policy practice and begin to espouse, for example, an approach of containment towards perceived enemies. In reality, however, although there are considerable differences between the Democratic administration of Obama and the previous Republican administration, "changes have not been as sharp as some of us expected" (D–Rep.). And the recent revelations about US spying on European allies and on the US population (Castle 2013) show that many things did not change. The Obama administration has continued many of the practices of the previous administration.

Furthermore, there is a widespread belief at the political elite level that the United States should continue to intervene in the world and be very active in promoting US interests. However, the interviews also reveal

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that the isolationist view is also considerable among a minority of politicians, mostly Republican representatives. In this view, "the US would be just as happy to be left alone surrounded by the ocean" (R–Rep.). Even though there is still a majority of political leaders in favor of a continued US presence in the world, a sizeable sector of the Republican Party has become more isolationist. The 2008, 2010, and 2012 elections have produced a Congress with a considerable proportion of its members being clearly isolationist. This has influenced the tone of the debate on foreign affairs, although not a major deviation in practice of the traditional US foreign policy.

> There is a major difference between the executive branch and the Congress in recent years. The people elected lately in the Congress are less knowledgeable and have no experience on foreign policy, and therefore tend instinctively towards isolationism. Both the diminishing of knowledge of foreign policy and lack of experience of Congress has limited the interest on foreign policy among the legislative branches. (Former US official)

The people who espouse isolationism do not understand why the United States is always called upon to solve all the problems of the world. Many people (including some members of Congress) see the United Nations as the entity that should act and address the problems of the world. However, many of the same people who would like to see the US government concentrate more on domestic issues also believe that US interventions are for the good of everyone. There are a few exceptions among US politicians, who defend the non-interventionist stance in almost any circumstance. Former Representative Ron Paul (R–TX) is one of the most visible advocates of this perspective. Some interviewees recognize, however, that the population at large does not necessarily share the interventionist vision of the political elite, as the following quote shows:

> At the elite level there is almost a consensus among the two main parties, Republicans and Democrats, on foreign policy. That is, that the US should be actively engaged in the world. While a considerable proportion of the population, however, and some academics would like to see the US less engaged in international affairs and adopt a more isolationist policy. (think-tank expert/former foreign affairs official)

The thinking of the population as revealed by polls depicts a more complex and contradictory picture which changes depending on the nature of the question asked. For instance, when asked in general

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about whether it is best for the future of the United States to be actively involved in world affairs, support for the US engagement in the world is very high—83 percent according to a Pew poll (2012). However, the same poll revealed much less agreement on the use of US military force, and a large majority (63 percent) would like to see the United States less involved in Middle East political change. Furthermore, in a CBS poll (Montopoli 2011), which asked questions about whether the United States should be involved in promoting democracy around the world, 7 out of 10 US citizens opposed US intervention in other countries to promote democracy and 77 percent supported a withdrawal from Iraq. Two other Pew surveys (Pew Research Center 2005 and 2012), confirmed these tendencies towards isolationism among the population at large in the last decade. For instance, in the most recent survey, two out of three Americans believed the United States should be less involved with leadership changes in the Middle East "Arab Spring" revolutions. Rather, 54 percent said it was more important to have stable, authoritarian-led governments than trying to spread democracy. In fact, American support for promoting democracy abroad sharply shrank over the past 10 years or so. According to Pew (2012) in 2005, 24 percent believed promoting democracy should be a high priority; now, 13 percent endorse the same view, probably because of the economic cost and loss of lives in the US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Basically, the key concern for the population at large regarding US foreign policy is not regime change in other countries or establishing democracy, but protecting US security. In a Third Way survey (Bennet et al. 2007) two statements were proposed, and 68 percent of respondents agreed more with the statement that said the "main goal of US foreign policy should be to protect American security, whether it spreads our ideals or not," as opposed to the 27 percent who said the main goal "should be to spread our ideals, including freedom and democracy." Furthermore, the June 2006 German Marshall Fund poll also found a majority of 56 percent who rejected "sending military forces to remove authoritarian regimes" as a method to help democracy (only 34 percent would support it). Politicians interviewed explained the views among the population as a result of 9/11:

> There was a shock in 9/11. The American people could not understand why those people hate us if we are always doing great things in the world. They perceive the US as not looking for trouble; only helping in the world. (D–Senator, senior advisor)

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Although all these polls do show, with some apparent contradictions, that overall there is a gap between members of the US public who would like to see the United States withdrawing from all these international commitments and concentrating more on domestic policies, and a majority of the political elites who tend to advocate expanding America's global leadership as the interviews and other declarations reveal. In fact, the US public seems to have taken a pragmatic and realist approach to US foreign policy, and the large majority favor as a rule that the United States should pursue "US interests," and sometimes this means promoting democracy and sometimes supporting non-democratic governments, as revealed in the PIPA Chicago Council Poll (2005). In short, according to these interpretations, the views of the population tend to be more inner-focused than the political elite, which tends to be more outer-focused.

Furthermore, two interviewees suggested that there are differences in the interventionist stance between the Republican and the Democratic parties. A think-tank expert interviewed suggested that both political parties have changed over time regarding the US presence in the world:

> The Democratic Party from World War I until the late fifties was the party of national security. With the Vietnam War, that really changed. The Democrats started to have doubts about military interventions. And since then the Democrats tend to be more reluctant than Republicans to consider the use of military force.

While it is true that US military interventions under Democratic administrations since the 1970s have been rare, in practice, even if reluctant, Democratic administrations have resorted to the use of force, or covert operations, as several interventions in Latin America suggest; the most recent such intervention was in Libya. In addition, my interviews do not show a major gap between the two parties in the key issues of foreign policy, but they do show that there are more people willing to take a more critical stance on certain policies among a minority of interviewees from the Democratic Party, and one interviewee from the Republican Party was less inclined than other colleagues to support US intervention in all cases. One has to keep in mind that all interviewees in this sample were politicians who were either members of foreign affairs committees in the House of Representatives or the Senate, or occupied positions related to foreign affairs (including think-tank experts); therefore, they tended to be more engaged with the world in their perspectives, and there is a possibility that they would not be

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representative of the thinking of a minority of their respective parties who might tend to be more isolationist.

The reality is that even if the US government wanted it, it is now impossible to be completely isolated. As the conservative columnist Robert Maginnis (2013) writes:

> America's modern structure depends on the globalized interdependency of information, work, security, economy and culture. Economically we can't survive as an isolationist country, because we no longer have a manufacturing base to meet our needs and commodities, like food and oil, make the US globally interdependent. Our national security depends on a global presence and instant global communications. Our financial services and education attract and depend on people from across the world. And the pace of global integration is speeding up due to dramatic advances in technology, communications, science, transport and industry.

It would be possible, and perhaps desirable in order to be more at peace with the rest of the world that the United States started to play a lesser role as gendarme of the world, and certainly be less interventionist in other countries' affairs, but it would be impossible to separate completely from the world. In the following sections I analyze the views of the US political elites on issues related to NATO, the Warsaw Pact, France, and Europe in general.

NATO, Warsaw Pact, and Europe

On May 14, 1955, the Soviet Union formed the Warsaw Pact (officially named The Warsaw Treaty Organization) with several Communist-dominated countries of Eastern Europe. This political and military alliance was established to counterbalance the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) formed by the Allies four years after World War II, in 1949. The leadership of the Soviet Union above all feared an invasion from Western Europe, but the Warsaw Pact was also used to strengthen relations with the countries of Eastern Europe and to create a framework that allowed the Soviet Union to intervene in case of unrest, as eventually happened in some of these countries (Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, and Poland 1981).

The view of most Western European governments toward the Pact was one of great concern at the beginning, and then of accommodation. In particular, as we saw in the previous chapter, the French government

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early on had adopted a conciliatory position regarding the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, French policy in international affairs has been characterized since the late 1950s by a strong desire for independence from the United States and a desire to have a say in world affairs, particularly in Europe as well as in the francophone countries of Africa. This assertiveness often produced confrontations with the US administration. Several US interviewees expressed dismay at the French attitude regarding the US interventions in the world, and had a very critical view of French measures, especially since the 1960s, referring often to de Gaulle's decision to pull out from the military command of NATO (although many of them assumed that France had pulled out of NATO altogether), and particularly the request to move the US bases out of France: "The truth is that France, especially since the 1950s, has always been a problem for the U.S., and for our policies in Europe and the Middle East" (R–Senator, senior advisor). The following quote from an article written by Major Alfred R. Uhalt ([Airforce] 2003, 4) reflects the US reaction to the French government's decision to withdraw from NATO's command structure in the 1960s and the opinion that has been formed through the years about France among a large proportion of the US population.

> In general, the United States feels let down, if not virtually betrayed by the French action. Americans cannot understand this reaction to what they consider their freely offered helping and guiding hands, under which the French nation has recovered from the ravages of war and grown to her present stature and position in the world community. In the last half century, Americans feel, the United States has done more for France and the French people than any nation in history has ever done for another.

The decision by the French government in the 1960s to create its own nuclear deterrence, called *La Force de Frappe*, and withdrawing from the command structure of the military alliance was perceived in the United States at the time as an attempt to replace the United States as the foundation of the European defensive alliance. Furthermore, French desire for independence from the United States and the French government's determination to have a say in the direction of the world, was viewed as an attempt at undermining and downgrading the position of the United States in Europe and the world (Paxton and Wahl 1994; Uhalt 1967; Vaïsse 2004; Verdaguer 2003). For the US government, the extensive and expensive buildup of French military power, which started under de Gaulle, and particularly the nuclear bomb, was redundant with United

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were also other measures taken by the Bush administration on French imports, including increasing the taxes for some French cheese, such as Roquefort, by 300 percent, and some conservative organizations called for a boycott of French products. These were mostly symbolic measures that did not much affect the bottom line of the economic exchange between the United States and France (very few Americans consume Roquefort cheese anyway). In fact, according to the US Census Bureau, the United States increased the imports of French goods and services from February 2002 to February 2004 by the equivalent of $2.18 billion. However, all these political initiatives were part of a strong campaign to demonize France, and key players in the media were the conservative News Corporation's outlets, such as Fox News Network and Fox Entertainment Group, which belong to Rupert Murdoch and his family, characterized by the French newspaper Le Figaro (Duplouich 2003) as zealous servants of anti-French propaganda.

Media commentators such as Bill O'Reilly (Fox News) and Andy Rooney (CBS News) characterized the French as ungrateful for their opposition of contemporary US foreign policy after so many US lives were lost to liberate France from the Germans in World War II. These statements were very much a reflection of what was heard in conversations during this research and what a majority of US political leaders apparently believe. For instance, a widespread idea among US citizens is that "we usually try to do the right thing" in international affairs. Andy Rooney (2003) also stated that the French owe the United States the "independence they flaunt at our face at the U.N." That is another topic that is well ingrained into the US mindset: without the United States, France would not be free. Rooney ended up his commentary by stating: "The French have not earned their right to oppose President Bush's plans to attack Iraq." Basically, from the vast majority of US political leaders' point of view, as well as that of several commentators, and a large proportion of the public, the prevailing sentiment was that "France was not a reliable partner in world affairs" (R–Senate). Although a former official interviewed, represented minority thinking when he suggested that "the views on France of many of the political leaders were too extreme and often baseless," he added:

> I think that the differences with France and some of our European allies are more on tactics than anything else. For example, we do not see every issue eye to eye in the Middle East. The French have expressed more sympathy toward the Palestinians and are more critical of Israel than we are, but

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> overall we both support the peace process and trying to move the solutions forward. Besides, we have the same fundamental views regarding Russia. Both governments supported the policy of containment throughout the cold war period and we have both always engaged with Russia.

The American clashes over the Iraq War were not limited to France, or for that matter to most of Western Europe versus the United States. As is well known, there were also confrontations within the United States. Already during the presidency of George H.W. Bush there were confrontations between the idealists, the realists, and the neoconservatives on the pertinence of using the US military to produce regime change in Iraq and on how to bring about democracy, respect for human rights and so on, to the Middle East.

The opposition to the war in the United States originally consisted of a small group of elected officials from the Democratic Party and a considerable proportion of the population during the George W. Bush administration, which grew as the war prolonged. After a few years a large proportion of Democrats, many of whom had originally voted in favor of intervention in Iraq, started to question openly the validity and even the legitimacy of that war, as well as the burden that it created for the US government. Furthermore, Democrats wanted to shift resources to Afghanistan, to fight the resurgence of the Taliban. Their argument was that the Bush administration had overlooked the situation in Afghanistan for many years and allowed the Taliban forces to regroup and gain strength. By 2007, a majority of Democrats felt a strong antagonism towards Bush's decision to attack Iraq (even though, as mentioned earlier, a large majority had voted in favor of the invasion) and wanted to get out of the country as soon as possible.

It is important to point out, however, that even among those interviewees who disagreed with the invasion of Iraq, there was still an overwhelming majority who believed in the good intentions of the United States in that part of the world, as the following quotes reflect:

> Even though I was opposed to the Iraq War we have to recognize the work we have being doing, as a country, in Iraq and Afghanistan, such as trying to create institutions that value human rights and the rule of law and justice. We want to give the ability for children to go to school and women to have the rights of citizenship and so forth. (D–Rep.)

> Despite some disagreements we place an emphasis on not only rebuilding nations economically and to help creating the conditions for them to provide their own security and to defend themselves, but likewise in terms

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> of the constitutional mechanisms in the way they govern their countries. (D–Senator senior advisor)
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> I do not think that the intervention in Iraq was only over control of oil resources; I think that the Bush administration genuinely believed that through democratization of Iraq and extension of democracy to the Middle East it would improve the situation there. However, I do think that it was absurd to believe that we could bring democracy though military intervention. We went into Iraq because we could do it at the time. (think-tank expert)

The Iraq War was only one aspect of the different perceptions between US and French leaders regarding foreign policy in that part of the world. Indeed, the differences with France and with other countries of Europe, such as Germany, regarding the Middle East and Israel/Palestine in particular have been a major issue of contention, even though the objective of reaching peace appears to be the same. While in France there are voices that would be more inclined towards the Arabs and some towards Israel and in between, in the United States there is an overwhelming support for Israel, among US leaders, independently of the political party, although perhaps with less subtlety among Republicans. The interviews showed a clear inclination on the side of Israel, even among those who claimed a balanced approach:

> I do not think that everything Israel does is right. I think that they should stop building new settlements in the West Bank and should recognize Palestine as an independent state, but Israel is our friend and the only true democracy in the Middle East and we have to support its right to defend itself. (D–Senator)
>
> I strongly support the administration's efforts to defend Israel at the United Nations. I stand with Israel and its right to defend itself. Its citizens deserve to live without fear. Republicans or Democrats, we must continue to do all we can to strengthen this firm relation with the only true democracy in the Middle East. (R–Rep.)

In addition, these views are reflected in the pressure that the United States has tried to put on Europe over the years to take the side of Israel. For instance, Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R–FL), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, urged the governments of Europe and the European Union to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization on December 31, 2012 (Archives House 2013):

> I rise in strong support of House Resolution 834 introduced by my good friend and colleague from Pennsylvania, Mr. Kelly. The resolution before

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> the House condemns the ongoing violence perpetrated by Hezbollah and urges the European Union to classify Hezbollah as a designated terrorist organization. Now, in March 2005, the House voted on a similar resolution urging the European Union to add Hezbollah as a designated foreign terrorist organization. Yet, we are here again, nearly eight years later, again calling for the EU to take this long-overdue action.

The declaration of Senator Robert Menendez (D–NJ), chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, also reflect this bias on the side of Israel:

> Whatever challenges lay [sic] ahead, whatever new threats we face ... whether in the form of rockets from Gaza, a nuclear threat from Iran, the spillover of violence from Syria, or the rise of Islamist extremists anywhere in the region—the strength of Israel's democracy will remain a beacon of hope for good governance, economic progress, and the power of an enlightened society to foster democratic ideals. (Menendez 2013)

And he added:

> In my role in the Foreign Affairs Committee I try to contribute to shape American foreign policy through the complex geopolitics of the Middle East, but I have no doubt that we have to protect and stand with Israel and the Israeli people against the aggression of the Arabs. (Menendez 2013)

Similar views were expressed by Robert Casey (D–PA), chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs (2003):

> The United States must continue to support Israel's vigilance in preventing the militarization of Hamas. Israel has the right under international law to set up a naval blockade to keep weapons from being sent to Hamas and a responsibility to protect its homeland. Hamas is a terrorist organization that denies Israel's right to exist. It has indiscriminately fired thousands of rockets at Israeli citizens and towns. It is a proxy for Iran and the main impediment to peace in the region. I call upon Hamas to recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce the use of violence, and abide by previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinian people.

Only two of the American political leaders I interviewed expressed a divergent view, which called for a more balanced approach to the Israel/Palestine conflict. This view is illustrated in the following quote:

> I think that we need to have a more balanced view of the Israel/Palestine issue. After all Israel is occupying Palestinian territory. It is in fact in the

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> US interest to really obtain peace in the Middle East and to reach that objective we might need to adopt a different approach. The Obama administration seemed to have this approach but in the actual actions, they are still very much biased on the side of Israel. (D–Rep.)

There seems to be a consensus among interviewees from both parties as well as in public declarations in the media on key aspects of foreign policy regarding the Middle East, and the differences among US political leaders appear to be mostly on tactical issues, such as how many troops to keep in a country or when to withdraw, and so on. The key arguments expressed by the interviewees regarding the historical US support for Israel could be summarized in the following:

> I think that most people in House of Representatives, the Senate, and the administration think that Israel is a democracy under attack that must be defended; besides there is a strong pro-Israel lobby in the United States that includes Jewish organizations and evangelical Christians. (think-tank expert)

The general views expressed above regarding the differences with France and other European countries show a certain state of mind that considers the US as an exceptional country with great qualities and, therefore, the United States is a force of good for the world. This belief is exemplified in the following quote from George W.H. Bush: "The United States is the best and fairest and most decent nation on the face of the earth" (cited in Johnson 2013). Following that logic, US political leaders have difficulty accepting that other countries could have strong divergences with US foreign policy. Particularly if the country is an ally, with democratic traditions, these American leaders assume that the country must follow US leadership. This perspective was expressed by 11 Republicans and 6 Democrats in my sample; that is, 17 out of 30 interviewees (57 percent). This view reflects a messianic interpretation of the role that the US should play in the world as well as a self-serving and self-centered view of the world, and lack of empathy for other countries' views. More importantly, this belief has direct consequences for the US participation in international agreements. Indeed, since certain Americans assume that the United States has special characteristics above any other country, including the greatest laws and institutional arrangements, a large proportion of political leaders do not think that the United States should be bound by international agreements.

A think-tank expert sees this aspect as part of a recent trend in US politics. This trend is a more conservative approach to the world, one

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which also reflects the growth of ultra conservative movements within the United States, such as the Tea Party, which has been able to elect some of the most-right wing elements of the Republican Party, moving the party to the right, but also within the Democratic Party which in certain areas of the Midwest has also elected what are called conservative Democrats:

> In the last 10 years or so we have been electing to Congress a number of people who are not aware of the complexities of foreign policy and do not understand it. Therefore, they tend to behave in a very ethnocentric manner, and tend to disregard the visions of our allies and are rather confrontational. Many of them are also instinctively against the United Nations and any international organization. (think-tank expert)

Conclusion

The ideas expressed in the interviews by US political leaders echo what Godfrey Hodgson (2013) characterized as "an inflated rhetoric in which references are constantly made to the unique qualities of the American tradition and the American practice," and that the large majority of US political elites believe in the applicability of American values everywhere in the world. The belief in the United States as a force for good in the world is so ingrained among politicians from both parties that even those who criticized US intervention as wrong policies rarely mentioned that US interventions are in the country's self-interest. In other words, even those who disagreed strongly about George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, for example, never mentioned the possibility that it was for US imperialist aims of controlling the Middle East or the flow of oil.

Moreover, because of political leaders' belief in the idea that the United States is an exceptional country and a force for good in the world, together with its economic standing, they assume that most people in the world admire the United States and want to imitate its society. According to a Gallup poll, these ideas on the special distinctive goodness of the United States and that everybody would love to live like in the United States are shared by 80 percent of the US population (Jones 2010).

The American approach to foreign relations is very much based on this belief that the United States is an exceptional country. This is not limited to extreme views; this belief is shared by conservative politicians as well as the majority of Democrats interviewed in this research, and is reflected

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in official speeches and statements. The only difference is that extremists criticize the most moderate of not being exceptionalist enough. Indeed, as Thomas Friedman (2010) wrote, "Americans are often fighting over how 'exceptional' they are." Referring to a *Washington Post* article noting that Republicans Sarah Palin and Mike Huckabee were denouncing Obama for denying "American exceptionalism," Friedman stated, "Americans have replaced working to be exceptional with talking about how exceptional they still are. They don't seem to understand that you cannot declare yourself 'exceptional,' only others can bestow that adjective upon you."

To be sure, even though the sense of American exceptionalism has characterized US foreign policy for a long time (Dobson and Marsh 2001; McEvoy-Levy 2001), in the last eight years politicians from the Republican Party are the ones who have revived the concept of American exceptionalism by accusing the president and other Democrats of a lack of belief in the exceptional qualities of the United States, and there has been a continuous back-and-forth rhetoric on the issue, with both political parties trying to assert their strong belief in American exceptionalism. For instance, in a 2011 film, *A City Upon a Hill*, and a book, *A Nation Like No Other*, Republican Newt Gingrich argued that the US claim to "exceptionalism" is "built on the unique belief that our rights do not come from the government, but from God, giving honor and responsibility to the individual—not the state" (Stacy 2011). The belief that the United States is somehow favored by God is very widespread among the US population, and all the Republican leaders, and the majority of Democrats I interviewed held this view. One Republican in the same tone as Gingrich stated: "America is committed to individual freedom and limited government. Only in America do we accept God's principles above our government" (R–Rep.). Indeed, as Walter Mead (2006) states, "Religion explains American's sense of themselves as a chosen people, and their belief that they have a duty to spread their values throughout the world." In fact, religion is so much a part of everyday life in the United States that it is just considered common sense to refer to religious values and to God in political debates, including in foreign policy as much as in any other aspect; "it disappears into the mix" (Mead 2006), and as David Hollinger (2004, 95–6) writes: "Being 'religious' ... can provide a way of being 'American' in a country whose national identity is itself constituted by a dispersal of smaller groups whose identities are compatible with its own." The fundamentalist Gingrich and other Republicans' interpretation of US exceptionalism is perhaps not exactly shared by everyone, but as we

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saw in previous pages, most interviewees do believe in the superiority of United States' culture over other nations and that the United States has a destiny to transmit its values to the world, including in the realm of economic arrangements. In fact, even President Obama believes very much in this sense of destiny, or at least he expresses it in public: "We have a set of values that are enshrined in our constitution, in our body of law, in our democratic practices, in our belief in free speech and equality, that, though imperfect, are exceptional." He explicitly states that this belief is applied to US foreign policy: "America has a continued extraordinary role in leading the world toward peace and prosperity" (both statements cited by Hodgson 2013). These views suggest that US foreign policy will not deviate from the tradition established in the twentieth century, and most interviewees do not shy away from the idea of using military power if necessary to promote these views. These ideas are very much reflected in the published statement by Senator Robert Menendez (D–NJ 2013): "In my view the challenges of the twenty-first century world will require that we continue to project the wisdom of our democratic ideals everywhere and the power of our military strength where necessary."

Therefore, even if its presence is considerably reduced, in the near future we will still see US military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. Even those who demand withdrawal from these places do so because they want the United States to have enough resources to be able to respond to other challenges. "The problem I see with our presence in Afghanistan is that we are spending millions every day there while we could use those resources where they are more needed for our security" (D–Senator, senior advisor). And, indeed, overstretching is a major error that could cost the United States its standing in the world, as other previous dominant countries have experienced, and as Paul Kennedy's historical analysis shows (1987). When deciding on US foreign policy and US involvement in the world, political leaders should remember the statement by President John F. Kennedy (Quotes 2013):

> We must face the fact that the United States is nor omnipotent neither omniscient; that we are only 6 percent of the world's population; that we cannot impose our will upon the other 94 percent of mankind; that we cannot right every wrong or reverse every adversity; and that therefore there cannot be an American solution to every world problem.

In addition, while there is room for criticism and debate on what is the best strategy or tactic to use to advance US interests in the world, there

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is no room for questioning what are considered US interests. The issue of "American security" is directly tied to: a powerful military; a US military presence all over the world; and the use of the military if necessary to advance what is viewed as US economic interests, including the interest of US corporations in the world and the role of US corporations in influencing US foreign policy and other countries' political and economic policies, as several past studies have exposed (Milner 1997; Trubowitz 1998, Winters 1996). The recent publications by Coll (2012) about ExxonMobil, and the article by Jacobs and Page (2005, 107), are particularly relevant in unveiling that "U.S. foreign policy is most heavily and consistently influenced by internationally oriented business leaders."

Domestic and economic success influence foreign policy directly. For instance, the withdrawal of large numbers of troops from Iraq and the planned limitation of troops in Afghanistan result from a concern for economic recovery in the United States. The statements of most interviewees reflect a view of the world among political leaders but also among the population at large. A certain number of ideal values and general principles, which even if they are not necessarily applied in everyday life, are very much ingrained in the population.

The predominant ideology, which characterized the United States from the 1980s forward, is a form of fundamentalist market economy that the United States has been promoting abroad ever since. This ideology is accompanied by the predominant idea that democracy can only work with a free-market economy, and that the fewer regulations there are, the more democratic a country will be. Any country that needs economic help will be required to apply the rules of the market.

Most of the interviewees also think that the United States has a mission (some believe it was given from God) to spread the values, and culture of the United States in the world. And judging by different speeches at different times, most of the presidents mentioned here seem to share this view that the values of the United States are universal and, therefore, the great mission of the United States in the world is to transform the world into its image. This view was originally made part of US foreign policy early in the twentieth century by President Woodrow Wilson (Ambrosius 2002), who often intervened in Latin American affairs (invading several countries) and once stated, "I am going to teach the South American republics to elect good men" (Horgan 1984, 913). In fact, in most of the countries in which the United States intervened during the Wilson administration, atrocious dictators were left in place: such as in the

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Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Nicaragua. This issue of US intervention in many parts of the world, and particularly in Latin America, throughout the twentieth century, and US efforts to keep in place dictators who repress their populations, is rarely recognized among US political elites; the few who actually acknowledge these realities, would just say, "Those were errors of the past, no president would support today a dictatorship" (D–Rep.).

Basically the political elites have difficulty in accepting criticism of US actions in the world. They believe that the United States is intervening for the good of everyone, and they are reluctant to see its actions as motivated only by self-interest or the interests of US corporations. In their view, and judging by Pew polls (2005 and 2010) confirming that their view is shared by a large part of the US population, the United States only goes abroad because it is called upon to help: "We go to these places because people need us" (R–Senator). In short, there is a real confusion about why the United States is so engaged in the world, and at the same time there is a strong belief about the value of economic globalization as long as it is capitalist globalization; when addressing collective security, most interviewees mean, above all, US security, and the idea of a better world under the leadership of the United States

This is a very different view from that held by France and Europe in general. French leaders and other Western Europeans learned the limitation of their power from their own past imperial experiences and, perhaps, they are also conscious of their own weakness, combined with being less inclined than most US politicians to impose their political order upon the rest of the world. Therefore, they tend to look for international institutions and cooperation as important tools to achieve peace. US politicians do not negate completely the importance of international institutions, especially among Democratic Party leaders, but on many issues they tend to disregard those same institutions when they make decisions contrary to the will of the US government. The following chapter will elaborate on the specific issues developed here and compare them with views from the French political elite.

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