

U.S. Foreign Policy: War on Terror

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Despite the efforts of his administration, President Clinton had failed to articulate a coherent grand strategy that the public could get behind. Enlargement was too murky, its nuance smacked on decide-as-you-go politics, and, most importantly, it offered no vision to strive for or enemy to struggle against. The result was a predictably confusing mix of important successes (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo), embarrassing retreats (e.g., Somalia), and achievements that few cared about (e.g., Haiti). The public had gotten tired of the seemingly endless game of cat-and-mouse with Saddam Hussein, and was becoming dimly aware of the growing threat of radical Islamic terrorism.

The incoming Bush administration was quick to identify the problem. As the new National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice had put it in 2000,

The process of outlining a new foreign policy must begin by recognizing that the United States is in a remarkable position. Powerful secular trends are moving the world toward economic openness and—more unevenly—democracy and individual liberty. . . . In such an environment, American policies must help further these favorable trends by maintaining a disciplined and consistent foreign policy that separates the important from the trivial. The Clinton administration has assiduously avoided implementing such an agenda. Instead, every issue has been taken on its own terms—crisis by crisis, day by day. . . . But there is a high price to pay for this approach. In a democracy as pluralistic as ours, the absence of an articulated “national interest” either produces a fertile ground for those wishing to withdraw from the world or creates a vacuum to be filled by parochial groups and transitory pressures.¹

It was, however, easier to point to a problem than offer a solution. For all the talk about defending American interests by being more comfortable with exercising the tremendous power the U.S. now enjoyed unrivalled, Rice’s list of “key priorities” was quite unremarkable: military deterrence, promotion of democracy and free trade, cost-sharing with the allies, “comprehensive relationships” with Russia

¹Condoleezza Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, 71:1 (January–February, 2000), pp. 45–62.

and China, and dealing decisively with rogue regimes. If one finds it difficult to discern what, exactly, the differences here were compared to Clinton's foreign policy (especially during his second term), then it is because there were precious few. Aside from downgrading the emphasis on economic relations and human rights, the prescription was essentially more of the same. In fact, even the muscular military aspect was already evident in how Clinton was dealing with the failure of dual containment in the Middle East. Rice had also blasted the Clinton administration for its reliance on multilateralism and had insisted that the U.S. should not hesitate to use its power in pursuit of its interests although she had been remarkably vague as to what these interests could be.

Even if one read a lot into Rice as a campaign advisor to George W. Bush, the new president had no experience in foreign policy and astonishingly little interest in it. He distanced himself from what smacked of unilateralism and tempered Rice's fiery assertiveness with promises to conduct foreign affairs in a strong but humble way, avoid nation-building, and generally focus on arresting the increase in defense spending. He was a fiscal conservative who also had a base of supporters with a strong isolationist streak. He campaigned on anything but foreign policy: tax cuts, Social Security, and the budget. When he arrived at the White House, he appointed a roster of foreign affairs old-hands to compensate for his inexperience: Colin Powell as Secretary of State (he had been the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Persian Gulf War), Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense (he had served in that capacity under President Ford and had been President Reagan's special envoy to the Middle East during the Iran-Iraq War), and Dick Cheney as Vice President (he had been Secretary of Defense under President George H.W. Bush). Even then, it was not at all clear what foreign policy the President would follow. He withdrew the U.S. from the **Kyoto Protocol** on climate change (although the latter was dead on arrival in Congress, which is why Clinton had not submitted it for ratification). On the other hand, he was quite restrained when China demanded an apology for the collision of an American surveillance plane with a Chinese fighter. The first eight months of Bush's presidency gave no indication of any substantial substantive break with the policies of his predecessor.

1 Defining the War on Terror

All of this changed on September 11, 2001 when al-Qaeda struck the American homeland. Terrorism had not been high on the list of priorities; it was, in fact, entirely absent from Rice's list, which still focused on traditional states and their governments. Although al-Qaeda had become known to U.S. intelligence, it was more of a nuisance than a real threat, and the administration had opted for a long-term strategy to deal with it by eliminating its support base in Afghanistan through ending the Taliban rule there. The devastation wrought by the terrorist attacks on

9/11, however, suddenly thrust anti-terrorism to the forefront of the government's foreign policies, and the nation was ready to respond to the initiative of the President. But what shape would that initiative take?

President Bush's address to the nation on the day of the attacks stated that "our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. . . [which] were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. . . . The search is underway for those who were behind these evil acts. . . We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them." The initial response construed the objective rather narrowly to the defeat of al-Qaeda (the perpetrator) and the Taliban (the supporter). From this point on, a war in Afghanistan had become practically unavoidable, but had the definition remained that focused, this would have been the extent of it. The resulting policy would have been costly but it would have had a clear endgame.

The alternative was a broader concept that would broaden the struggle to something much grander. Global terrorism was not just America's problem, and this fact could be helpful in relations with Russia, China, and Pakistan, among others. Russia and China were both experiencing problems with radical Islamists, and Pakistan had been supporting the Taliban (and so, by extension, al-Qaeda). There were also no illusions in the administration that al-Qaeda was the extent of the problem: it was immediately recognized that the fundamental clash was between various jihadist groups and the West; al-Qaeda was merely one among many, albeit thus far the most successfully deadly one. Moreover, members of cabinet also knew just how difficult it was to target these shadowy organizations: they had networks that often stretched across different countries, and could relocate with relative ease when chased out of one place to another. Bin Laden himself and al-Qaeda operatives had functioned in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sudan, Algeria, and Egypt, among others. He had also shown one way to deal with these organizations: apply pressure through the governments. Bin Laden had to move to Sudan and then to Afghanistan, where he was able to survive only because of the protection offered by the Taliban. Al-Jihad had all but been destroyed in Egypt. Thus, a necessary component of the anti-terrorism strategy would be dealing with the host governments that sponsored, supported, or otherwise enabled terrorism.

Within days of the attack, the consensus in the administration coalesced around the expansive definition of terrorism: destroying al-Qaeda would require not merely apprehending or killing its leadership and targeting the Taliban; it might require extending operations to other places around the world where its members might run to and other organizations they might try to coopt or join. The dangers of letting some of these terrorists escape were magnified by the relative ease with which one could acquire very destructive and dangerous weapons in the modern world, be it chemical, biological or, some feared, even nuclear. The danger was particularly acute if these types of weapons proliferated to rogue regimes that could be tempted

to pass them onto terrorists.

This line of reasoning also inexorably led to one implication: the struggle against global terrorism would be long, very long as a matter of fact, if the goal was to defeat it as a phenomenon and not merely destroy one of its incarnations. In this, the policy would resemble the global struggle against communism that had occupied the country during the Cold War. But that struggle had only been possible because of the national consensus forged during the first years after the Second World War. The Soviet Union had been a powerful opponent, and its ideology and expansionist tendencies were clearly threatening the American way of life. The nation could be induced to enormous sacrifices in the name of containment. Similarly, if the U.S. were to be successful over the long run now, foreign policy would have to have sustained public support for its overarching objective. If this was merely to disperse al-Qaeda or topple the Taliban, the public enthusiasm for antiterrorist policies would be transitory at best, and would therefore prevent the U.S. from winning the important larger confrontation. If, on the other hand, the national interest was defined in broad terms that also included the moral dimension so honored by traditional American foreign policy, then perhaps a new consensus could be forged.

1.1 The Global Fight of Good vs. Evil

The first clear signal as to which way the administration was tilting came as early as September 20, when the President delivered an address to a joint session of Congress.² He first clearly distinguished between al-Qaeda and similar terrorist organizations that “practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholar and the vast majority of Muslim cleric — a fringe movement that prevents the peaceful teachings of Islam”, and similarly between the Taliban and the peace of Afghanistan who could practice religion “only as their leaders dictate”. He then issued an ultimatum to the Taliban to deliver all terrorists, dismantle all their training camps, and permit the U.S. full access to verify compliance. If they did not act immediately in handing over the terrorists, the Taliban would “share in their fate.” He then reiterated that neither Muslims nor Arabs were not the enemy of America, but “a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them.” Then came the key phrases:

Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.

Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.

²The full text can be found at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>, accessed March 7, 2016.

They want to overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. They want to drive Israel out of the Middle East. They want to drive Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa.

These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us, because we stand in their way.

We are not deceived by their pretenses to piety. We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions – by abandoning every value except the will to power – they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies.

Americans are asking: How will we fight and win this war? We will direct every resource at our command – every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war – to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network.

This war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with a decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion. It will not look like the air war above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat.

Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success. We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.

This was a great speech and it resonated widely with Americans.³ The President defined the danger the terrorists posed as going well beyond the physical destruction they could inflict on America. It went beyond the toppling of governments in the Middle East. It went straight to the heart of American ideals, and in particular the freedoms of a liberal political order. In this, Bush said, the terrorists were treading on a path Americans knew well: it had been the path of the fascists and

³About 87% of Americans thought the speech was either excellent or good, and late in 2001 a full 89% approved of Bush's handling of post-9/11 foreign policy.

the communists, of totalitarians of all stripes. And just like America had prevailed in the global struggles with these foes of old, so it would now against the latest iteration of radical ideology. And just like these previous struggles, this one would marshal every resource of the country toward ultimate victory. And just like these previous struggles, this one would not happen over night: it would be costly and it would be long. And just like these previous struggles, those who stand with us we would regard as our friends, and those who do not would become our enemies.

This last bit of “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” did raise eyebrows, and occasioned pundits to decry what they considered deplorable lack of nuance. After all, it was entirely possible to be against terrorists without siding with the Americans. More importantly, it was also possible to side with the Americans without subscribing to their definition of what anti-terrorism should look like. Some also decried what they considered going overboard on the rhetoric in defining the struggle in such apocalyptic terms as a fight between good and evil. But in both of these, the President was following a long tradition in American foreign policy, which had always tended to justify itself in moral terms. Some of this was doubtless due to the fact that only an agreement of the historical importance and justice of the mission could unite so many different Americans behind it.

The speech provided a moral and logical rationale for the new strategy, and it also imbued the nation with the sense of the historical role it had been called upon to play yet again. Here was a grand strategy that the nation could rally behind. On October 25, 2001, President Bush formally agreed to the expansive view in a National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD). **NSPD-9**, “Defeating the Terrorist Threat to the United States,” outlined the aim and strategies of foreign policy.⁴ The goal was as ambitious as they came: “Eliminate terrorism as a threat to our way of life and to all nations that love freedom, including the elimination of all terrorist organizations, networks, finances, and their access to WMD.” To achieve that goal, the U.S. would target al-Qaeda and “eliminate the threat from other terrorist groups that attack Americans or American interests” (here, Hezbollah, Hamas, and al-Jihad were explicitly mentioned), and “convince, and if necessary compel, states and non-state entities to cease harboring, sponsoring, and providing safe-havens to such terrorists.” In other words, the destruction of al-Qaeda was merely incidental to the greater goal of defending the American way of life. And to do that, the U.S. was going make anti-terrorism the linchpin of its foreign policy. Decisions would now be filtered by asking how they helped or hindered the war on terror. The faithfulness of friends would be judged by the litmus test of how enthusiastically they supported the U.S. in that fight. There would be no place for those that equivocated and tried to remain on the fence.

In his January 29, 2002 address before another joint session of Congress on the

⁴The declassified text of NSPD-9 can be found at <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspd/nspd-9.pdf>, accessed March 7, 2016.

State of the Union, the President doubled-down on the moral rhetoric. After specifically mentioning North Korea, Iran, and Iraq, he group them in the now-famous “axis of evil”:

States like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic.

We’ll be deliberate; yet, time is not on our side. I will not wait on events while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons.

Our war on terror is well begun, but it is only begun. This campaign may not be finished on our watch; yet, it must be and it will be waged on our watch. We can’t stop short. If we stop now, leaving terror camps intact and terrorist states unchecked, our sense of security would be false and temporary. History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom’s fight.⁵

We will discuss the notion of preemption reflected in the “I will not wait on events while dangers gather” line in a bit. Right now, it is worth thinking about the moral aspect of the strategy. Was this approach “full of liabilities” from “an objective perspective”? Did the President “blind Americans to the considerable complexity of the global environment”? Was it, in other words, counterproductive to label the terrorists as irrational freedom haters and ignore the links between U.S. foreign policy and problems in the Middle East?⁶ Was Bush’s “axis of evil” too simplistic (for not recognizing the diversity of interests in the modern world), too arrogant (for not permitting someone to be against terrorism but also against the U.S. and its “imperialist” policies), too naïve (for focusing on normative issues rather than tangible power and interests), or perhaps even a mere pretense (a cover for naked self-interest)?

The official strategy document made public in September of that year not only carried the moral aspect as its central notion, it asserted that the American ideal of “freedom, democracy, and free enterprise” was the “single sustainable model for national success” and the American values were “right and true for every person, in every society.” It is worth quoting the opening paragraph of the 2002 *National Security Strategy* in full:

⁵George W. Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 29, 2002. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29644>, accessed March 8, 2016.

⁶Hal Brands. *From Berlin to Baghdad: America’s Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, p. 280.

The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise. In the twenty-first century, only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity. People everywhere want to be able to speak freely; choose who will govern them; worship as they please; educate their children—male and female; own property; and enjoy the benefits of their labor. These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society—and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages.⁷

At this point it is customary (at least in some circles) to bemoan the exceptionalism and cultural insensitivity of these statements. Let us instead ask two questions. First, was Bush’s approach different from mainstream U.S. foreign policy? Second, is there anything we can say about the universality of the values championed by the U.S.?

1.2 American Exceptionalism

American exceptionalism has always been present, from the Revolution (a new nation with a unique ideology based on liberty, democracy, and laissez-faire capitalism) on. In the 20th century, it found expression in the war to end all wars (First World War), in the fight against Nazism and Japanese imperialism (Second World War), in the struggle against the “evil empire” of global communism (Cold War). In this vision, the U.S. behaves differently than traditional great powers and has a mission that goes well beyond the protection of its borders; it is a “city upon a hill” that serves as a beacon for these values and acts as their defender. For some, the obligation is not merely to defend these values but also to support extending them to others. Americans seem to share this vision in the sense that they demand more from the politicians when it comes to foreign policy. Justifying a policy in terms of cold “reason of state” or “balance of power” or “economic interests” simply will not do, as many presidents who occasionally tried doing that found out. The public simply would not go for it, and any such policy would be short-lived indeed. Even something as nebulous as “national security” cannot usually pass muster and often disintegrates when it conflicts with civil liberties. As a rule, Americans would only support wars that are somehow defined in these exceptionalist terms. (Even the supposedly cynical Western democracies whose leaders sometimes sneer at what they see as empty and off-putting American moralizing are actually very similar in that

⁷The White House. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>, accessed March 8, 2016.

their citizens also place huge demands on the politicians for justifying their wars. The difference could be that European governments cannot defend their policies in this way with a straight face — even when it might be the reality — because their countries have often not stood for anything more than “realism” in foreign policy (yes, even Republican France), and as a result cannot offer their citizens that.) For the U.S., the moral aspect—the “vision thing”—is not optional, it is not a “second-order effect”, as Rice would have it. It is an essential element of any policy that stands a reasonable chance of generating and sustaining public support. Bush was on very solid ground here if the Global War on Terror would have stood any chance politically at home.

If there is one significant downside to the moral stand that justifies waging war, it is that by defining the enemy as irredeemably evil in order to generate widespread public support, the government practically ensures that it would have to fight that opponent to the death. Negotiating with evil is unacceptable and the public, once aroused to believe that the enemy is evil, would not permit anything short of total victory. Most wars usually end with negotiated settlements, but wars that democracies fight tend to be prolonged and truly bloody affairs that end either with the exhaustion of their economies (or citizens) or, more often, with the total defeat of their opponents. It was for this very reason that some political theorists had decried the influence of the public on foreign affairs. Recall that Lippmann complained how during crises it was too difficult to persuade the public to do much about a looming danger (because one had to convince people with varying preferences of the importance of doing so — and the least common denominator would be to appeal to an existential threat posed by an essentially evil opponent) but that, once persuaded, the public then insisted on the total elimination of that threat. Or, as he had put it, the public often compelled the government to be “too late with too little, or too long with too much, too pacifist in peace and too bellicose in war, too neutralist or appeasing in negotiations or too intransigent.”⁸

1.3 Universality of Values

One can make an excellent argument against the cynics and those who think that the values championed by the U.S. are, if not bad, then at least not superior to others. I am going to come right out and say it: the values of Western-style liberty, democracy, and laissez-faire capitalism are unequivocally better than anything else humanity has come up with, at least if one cares about the objective well-being of people, as one ethically should. No other alternative has been able to deliver so much so quickly in making everyone so much better off. What do I mean by that? For centuries, humanity was mired in poverty: the average human lived on the equivalent of \$3 per day, whatever progress occurred was slow, easily reversible, and occasionally lost for centuries, and people lived closed to the edge, only a bad harvest

⁸Walter Lippmann. 1955. *The Public Philosophy*. New York: Atlantic-Little Brown, p. 20.

away from starvation or a plague away from massive depopulation. But then, starting uncertainly in the 17th century in the Dutch Republic but then firmly in the late 18th in Britain, something remarkable happened: some societies began a process of sustained economic development that had been absolutely unprecedented, what some call “The Great Enrichment”.⁹ While previous periods of remarkable growth could perhaps double the per capita income of the respective populations, and even then, only briefly, this one increased it by anything between 2,900 to 9,900 percent. The average American now lives on \$130 per day, and the average citizen in the developed West lives on between \$80 and \$110 per day. Moreover, the average person globally has been enriched by a factor of 10 despite massive increases in population. Before one decries the poverty that still exists around the world, consider the following.

World poverty is falling. Between 1970 and 2006, the global poverty rate (defined in absolute, not relative—which is what the common but very misleading GINI coefficients measure—terms) has been cut by nearly 80%. The percentage of the world population living on less than \$1 a day (in PPT-adjusted 2000 dollars) went from 26.8% in 1970 to 5.4% in 2006. That is, the number of poor fell from 403 million to 152 million while the global population *increased* from 3.69 billion to 6.57 billion (by 78%) over the same period.¹⁰

There has been a lot of hue and cry recently about rising inequality.¹¹ It is important to realize that this inequality is *relative*: the rich are getting richer while others have either had their incomes stagnate or growing at a much slower pace. It is sometimes claimed that the purchasing power of the middle class has not changed since the 1970s. If you simply count the number of cars and TVs one could buy, then perhaps you would get the same number. But what about the *quality* of the car and TV set you get today? If you got 100K miles out of your 1973 car, it would have been extraordinary. If you got 100K miles out of your modern car, you would sue the manufacturer for selling you a lemon. In 1973, your TV set was at most

⁹The economic historian Deirdre McCloskey is most closely associated with this term and the argument that one cannot understand the modern world without being able to explain this astonishing enrichment. See her summary in “The Great Enrichment Came and Comes from Ethics and Rhetoric”, <http://www.deirdremccloskey.org/docs/pdf/IndiaPaperMcCloskey.pdf>, accessed March 8, 2016. For a sustained examination of the shortcomings of alternative explanations, see Deirdre McCloskey. 2011. *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. A great book on the topic of how humanity's condition has been getting better (if one measures consumption rather than income) is Angus Deaton. 2013. *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁰Maxim Pinkovskiy and Xavier Sala-i-Martin. 2009. “Parametric Estimations of the World Distribution of Income,” National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 15433. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w15433>, accessed March 8, 2016.

¹¹Thomas Piketty. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Joseph E. Stiglitz. 2013. *The Price of Inequality: How today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

25 inches, had crappy resolution and no remote. Can you even begin to compare this to the modern smart OLED TV with 65-inch screens, 4K resolution, and a remote that can pilot the space shuttle? What about their built-in Wi-Fi and apps like Netflix and Facebook? The Internet and the iPhones, things one could not even imagine in the 1970s (well, OK, perhaps a brave visionary could have imagined how ARPANET, established in 1969, would become more than a system designed to survive a nuclear war and evolve in today's Internet), are now more or less standard (from no mobile phones in 1970 to over 6 billion today). Can one seriously contend that they are "the same"?

The problem is that standard economic measures of purchasing power do not really account for quality improvements, and these have been mind-boggling. People get better and cheaper medicine, have better working conditions, live longer, enjoy longer and better retirement, access more and better maintained public parks, and get far more education. The simple truth is that the U.S. has gotten way wealthier over the past several decades, and *everyone* in it has benefitted. The lives of the poor have improved and are continuing to do so. The percent of the desperately poor is approaching zero. Data on consumption and labor time required to purchase consumer goods show that today poor Americans live better than the middle class did in the 1970s. About 82% of children of the bottom 20% in 1969 had real incomes in 2000 that were higher than what their parents had; the median of that income was double that of their parents.

None of this is to deny that it is surely unhealthy that the distribution of profits accrues so disproportionately to the top 1% of the population and that the middle class is deprived of the just wage increases that should have gone to it in reflection of its vast increases in productivity. It is surely disturbing that the middle-income households still spend about 70% of their income on basics (food at home, cars, clothes, furniture, housing, utilities) but now need two incomes to do so. It is certainly great that so many women have entered the workforce, but it certainly not great that the extra income they bring to the family has not enabled their households to spend more on things beyond these basics. It is surely ethically repugnant that the wealthy 1% waste tremendous amounts of money on idiotic things like \$16.75 per ounce of mineral water, \$300 burgers, \$1,000 omelets, \$800,000 sports cars, \$8 million diamond-encrusted iPhones, \$40 million jets, and \$300 million mega yachts. It is surely shameful that they find it necessary to own five yachts, ten mansions, 150 pairs of shoes, and whatever. (How much enjoyment does one get out of one of these 150 pairs?) It is undeniable that there are countless ways one could spend that money in a more just and socially responsible manner. The trick is to do so without breaking the system that has been such an engine for development.

This is where the ideals associated with American exceptionalism come into play. Simply stated, the only way to provide for sustained development and enrichment is through economic and political institutions that permit innovation: this means free markets where ideas can be tried and given a chance to succeed or fail and

where inefficient or obsolete businesses will perish; this means political rights and liberties for the people who drive these markets — the middle class in particular; and it means no government-created or government-sanctioned or government-sustained monopolies. Improvements in efficiency can be directed from above, and a single-minded focus on particular goals can also enable authoritarian and totalitarian governments to achieve remarkably quick progress toward *known* ends, often using *known* technologies and improving upon them. But no government is omniscient; no government can predict the things not yet invented, let alone their impact on society. Innovation can only happen if many, many individuals are free to experiment with their ideas: most will likely fail but the few that succeed could be transformative. When such success happens, it can enrich few individuals but for society to reap the benefits, the profits have to be dissipated by competitive markets: when others are attracted by the oversized profits accruing to the few, suppliers will enter the market, driving the prices down and distributing the benefits much more widely to consumers. This is why monopolies of various sorts must be broken up. Individuals must be given economic and social incentives to pursue what their imaginations create, and this means the political and economic order must reward them for doing so. This means no hierarchy of birth, religion, wealth or color to reward arbitrary traits while preventing others from pursuing their dreams. This means celebrating those who dare enter the markets with “crazy” ideas. Above all, this means relishing constant change, the permanent adjustment to the new, and the falling away of cherished old concepts when they are no longer needed or acceptable. No backward-looking order that seeks to preserve the obsolete at all costs can spur on the human engine for progress. No other ideology gives you that, and no other ideology can succeed because there is simply no way to unleash human creativity in another setting. These are *not* uniquely *American* ideals: after all, I just associated them with the Dutch and the British. . . but this is precisely the good news: any people who adopt them could hope for the same results.

Where does all of this leave us? For one, people should be very suspicious of claims about “just” political and social orders that have been shown to be complete and abject failures at sustaining economic growth. Simply put, there is no substitute for overall enrichment when it comes to ensuring higher quality lives of the many. And the evidence suggests that the only way to accomplish this is through the institutions the West stumbled upon only a few centuries ago. But people should also be quite wary of any claims that the “market” somehow endows any particular distribution of wealth with moral values. In fact, the tremendous concentration of wealth over the past few decades is not because of the “market” — there is no such thing as the “market” aside from the property rights and their enforcement provided by the government — but because of specific government policies. It is a repeat of the typical story that has plagued humanity from the get-go: when the wealthy elites appropriate access to the government, they can use it to monopolize profits thereby destroying the very advantage that the markets are supposed to provide.

This is why the concentration of wealth is so dangerous: because it will inevitably undermine the institutions that generate growth — and thus hurt us all— and not because some despicable human beings find it acceptable to flush millions down the toilet. It is dangerous because the privileges of wealth tend to produce dynasties that stifle economic mobility and depress the chances of sustained innovation. It should come as no surprise that the incredible rise in inequality has been associated with the U.S. falling behind in competitiveness and innovation.¹²

At any rate, the fact that our society is a work in progress in need of constant tending and care in no way invalidates the fact that its foundation is fundamentally sound. It is also crucial to remember that neither free markets nor democracy nor liberalism by themselves can do the trick—all are necessary (and, sadly, as the latest experiences in the U.S. also show, they might not be sufficient).

1.4 Aspects of Implementation

The overwhelming approval of Bush’s definition of the new/old role America was going to play was reflected in the complete reversal of the politics Congress had been engaged in over the past decade. Recall that during the Clinton years, the Republican-dominated Congress had tried to wrest control of foreign policy from the executive. Some of it was certainly due to party opposition to the Democratic President, but some of it was an attempt to curb the power of the presidency more generally. Whereas in 1947, Congress had waited for the President (Truman) to explain what the threat was, this time it acted almost immediately. Only a week after the attacks, Congress approved a Joint Resolution

That the President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.¹³

With this **Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF)**, Congress essentially surrendered all control of the foreign policy agenda to the executive. First, it empowered the president to target not merely states (“nations”) but non-state actors (“organizations”) and even individuals (“persons”). Second, it was deliberately left

¹²Michael Greenstone and Adam Looney, “A Dozen Economic Facts about Innovation,” The Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution, Working Paper, August 2011. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2011/08/innovation-greenstone-looney>, accessed March 8, 2016.

¹³U.S. Congress Joint Resolution “To authorize the use of United States Armed Forces against those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States.” Public Law 107-40, September 18, 2001. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-107publ40/pdf/PLAW-107publ40.pdf>, accessed March 9, 2016.

broad and open to interpretation since it did not list specific examples of these targets such as the Taliban government in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda, or even bin Laden. Third, it specifically left it to the president to decide who and what was going to end up on that list (“he determines”). The scope of this authorization was construed accordingly by both Presidents Bush and Obama, who invoked it to deploy or use U.S. armed forces in Afghanistan, the Philippines, Georgia, Yemen, Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iraq, and Somalia; to engage terrorist groups “around the world” and “on the high seas”; to detain individuals at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; and to conduct trials of terrorist suspects in military commissions. Fourth, it specified no time limits to the actions it authorized in recognition that this would be a long engagement. Indeed, as of March 2016 the President is still invoking the authority of AUMF for actions against ISIS and other militant groups.¹⁴

The resolution was passed essentially unanimously—98 to 0 in the Senate, and 420 to 1 in the House—and giving a blank check to the executive was intentional. As both Republican and Democrat representatives noted at the time, the goal was to give the initiative to the President, who would have approval to do almost anything he wanted without many strings attached by Congress. By the end of the year, Congress began to interpret foreign policy legislation through the prism of the War on Terror and ask whether it was helping or hindering the effort to combat terrorism. As Mitch McConnell put it with respect to removing sanctions against Pakistan and restoring foreign aid to its military regime, “We need to reward those countries that cooperate with us in fighting terrorism and punish those countries that don’t.”¹⁵ This is how Pakistan, whose relations with the U.S. had become seriously strained during the 1990s (with sanctions slapped in 1993) became a U.S. friend virtually overnight. The country that had supported the Taliban, and whose several intelligence officers had been killed in the 1998s strikes on al-Qaeda’s training camp in Afghanistan, turned into one of Washington’s staunchest allies in the war on terror.

¹⁴After being pestered by Congress to submit a fresh request for authorization to use military force to fight the Islamic State, President Obama did so on February 11, 2015. (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/11/letter-president-authorization-use-united-states-armed-forces-connection>, accessed March 10, 2016). He maintained that the 2001 AUMF that authorized the war on terror was still in effect, and the specific authorization to fight ISIS should be construed as a template on how to tailor the broad authority granted under 2001 AUMF. As of today, March 10 2016, Congress has done nothing about this AUMF, and the U.S. has been waging war with ISIS for two years. Since Congress did vote down a proposal to force the President to withdraw the U.S. military from Syria and Iraq, both the 2001 AUMF and the doctrine of implicit authorization to use force unequivocally imply that Congress has, in fact, declared war on ISIS. It is worth noting that his earlier attempt to get an AUMF from Congress in 2013 in order to engage in military action against the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria did not even get a vote.

¹⁵Quoted in Hal Brands. 2008. *From Berlin to Baghdad: America’s Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, p. 281.

2 War in Afghanistan

The Taliban had already defied both of their original sponsors (Saudi Arabia and Pakistan) over their playing host to bin Laden and al-Qaeda's training facilities. With both of these sponsors now firmly on the U.S. side, there was no leverage with the regime. When the predictable refusal to comply with the American ultimatum came, the U.S. geared up for war. The American strategy was relatively simple: assist Taliban's opponents in toppling the regime. The group the U.S. chose to assist was the **Northern Alliance**, which had been formed in 1996 to fight the Taliban. Its Tajik core was led by Ahmad Shah Massoud, the famous and very successful mujahideen, but within a few years leaders of other ethnic groups also joined the confederation. They had been receiving support from Russia, Iran, Turkey, Tajikistan, and China but had been stuck fighting a defensive war without making much progress. In early 2001, Massoud had denounced the Taliban to the European Parliament and warned that his group had picked up intelligence about a large-scale attack in the U.S. by al-Qaeda. He asked for action to compel Pakistan to withdraw its support for the Taliban and claimed that neither the Taliban nor al-Qaeda would be able to survive for long without. Just two days before 9/11, Massoud was assassinated by al-Qaeda agents posing as journalists.

The U.S. special forces and CIA agents made contact with the Northern Alliance on September 26, and provided it with money, weapons, and supplies. They coordinated air support and urged its leaders to go on the offensive. On October 7, the U.S. military went into action with its first air strikes against Taliban targets as part of **Operation Enduring Freedom** with the assistance of the U.K.¹⁶ Although progress was tentative at first, within a few weeks American air power began to wreak havoc with the Taliban front lines, and by the end of the year the Northern Alliance overran most of Afghanistan and took Kabul. Although this strategy kept American casualties to a minimum, it also permitted bin Laden to evade capture. It was to rectify this that the U.S. and its allies now sent 30,000 regular troops to hunt al-Qaeda survivors and remnants of the Taliban hiding in southeastern Afghanistan. Bin Laden remained at large.

¹⁶NATO had invoked Article 5 on September 12 for the first time in its history, and declared the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. attacks upon the alliance, which activated its collective defense clause.