

Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide

America and the Use of Force: Sources of Legitimacy



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Many American and foreign observers believe that the painful and so far unsuccessful intervention in Iraq will make the United States more reluctant to go to war in the future. Three powerful factors, however, suggest that, to the contrary, the United States may resort to military action more, not less, often in the future. The character of US foreign policy, manifested over two centuries, is that of a nation willing to use force with relative frequency on behalf of both principles and tangible interests and generally believing in the justness and appropriateness of military action in international affairs. The distribution of power in the world since the collapse of the Soviet Union—not very different today, despite the rise of powers such as China and India—invites military intervention by a dominant military power unchecked by the deterrent power of any nation or grouping of nations with roughly equal strength. Finally, the contemporary international system presents an array of circumstances in which the use of force will be seen as both necessary and proper. Indeed, the number of such challenges—be they to curb proliferation, counter terrorists, curtail gross human rights violations, or counter some other threat requiring military action—is likely to increase, not decrease, in the years ahead.

These three factors have already produced a 15-year post-Cold War period in which the United States has taken military action with greater frequency than ever before and with far greater frequency than any other nation during that time. From 1989 to 2003 the United States intervened with significant military force on nine occasions—Panama (1989), Somalia (1992), Haiti (1994), Bosnia (1995-96), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001), and Iraq (1991, 1998, 2003), an average of one large-scale military intervention every 18 months. This interventionism has been a bipartisan affair—five interventions were launched by Republican administrations, four by Democratic administrations—and regardless of often-alleged, but in fact largely mythical doctrinal distinctions. The supposedly “realist” administration of George H. W. Bush, for instance, launched two interventions aimed at purely “humanitarian” purposes (Somalia) or to remove a dictator and effect a change of regime (Panama.) The supposedly “liberal internationalist” Clinton administration carried out three military interventions without the approval of the UN Security Council and two (Kosovo and Iraq in 1998) over the public objections of one or more of the council’s permanent members. At least one intervention, in Haiti in 1994, was undertaken explicitly to

remove a dictatorship, reinstall a democracy, and effect a change of regime. But its two interventions in the Balkans also aimed in part at undermining the power of Slobodan Milošević and eventually unseating him, as the Kosovo war ultimately did.

Some argue that the failures in Iraq may temper these impulses. Perhaps. But history suggests that any such tempering may be short-lived. It was only a few years after the US defeat in Vietnam—an even more unpopular and divisive war—that the United States returned to a foreign policy with military power as an essential component and “regime change” a primary objective. If the Reagan administration, which led this return to pre-1970s orthodoxy, used direct military force only sparingly, that hesitation was because it faced a rival superpower: the Soviet Union. Today, in the continuing absence of such a constraint—even a rising China is a long way from replacing the Soviet Union as a rival power—the US willingness to use force to alter the status quo may return even more quickly than it did after Vietnam.

International conditions provide US leaders with abundant potential uses of force to consider. Unlike in the 1990s, when the first Bush and Clinton administrations launched several military interventions despite the lack of any obvious, direct threat to US security, in this decade, following the September 11, 2001, attacks, both political parties agree that a variety of foreign actors could present a threat. The new, post-September 11 perspective has cast some old problems in a new and more ominous light. The problem of failed states,

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for instance, once categorized as largely a humanitarian issue, has now acquired strategic significance given the terrorist infiltration into Afghanistan and Somalia. North Korea’s acquisition of nuclear weapons presents a heightened threat because of the prospect that such weapons or technologies may fall into the hands of terrorists willing to use them against the United States and other nations. A sturdy political consensus opposes Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons on similar grounds.

In this respect, the attack on the American homeland on September 11, 2001, has had much the same effect as the attack on Pearl Harbor did six decades earlier. It has provided justification for an active, and at times even aggressive, defense of American interests far beyond America’s borders. To be sure, the change of course was much sharper in the 1940s than it is today. In important ways, September 11 merely confirmed the need for an interventionist approach that had already been adopted after the end of the Cold War.

Beyond the prominent issues of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, there are a number of other, more traditional conflicts that could escalate into military confrontations—some of which might even involve a clash with other great powers. The determination of Taiwan’s future could lead the United States and China into a limited military confrontation that might well spiral into a more significant clash, even though neither nation would desire such a confrontation. A war between Russia and Georgia is not beyond imagining and could pit Moscow and Washington against each other, along with some European powers that might feel obliged to come to Georgia’s defense. The United States could again find itself in a military confrontation with Syria over Lebanon, as in the early 1980s. In the Western Hemisphere the United States has a 200-year history of using force, including quite recent interventions in Panama and Haiti. There has scarcely been a decade in the past century when the United States did not send troops to Latin America for some purpose. Who knows what catalyst for intervention the next decade might bring?

Violence and chaos in Cuba following the death of Castro could prompt a US-led international intervention both to avert a humanitarian disaster and to ensure a desirable transition from the US point of view.

Meanwhile, a significant US military buildup continues and may be accelerating. The US defense budget has risen substantially since the late 1990s and is now approaching \$500 billion a year. The percentage of GDP devoted to defense has risen from just over 3 percent to more than 4 percent—not high by Cold War standards, but higher than what most expected after the Cold War ended. The striking thing is that this buildup has proceeded without any domestic opposition. Both political parties have agreed that forces needed to be improved and augmented, and now both parties seem to agree that the size of US ground forces, until recently thought to be too large, must now

Europe, no longer depend on American power and have instead become suspicious and wary of it. The legitimacy of American power and of American global leadership has encountered growing skepticism from a majority of Europeans, especially Western Europeans, who generally accorded the United States legitimacy throughout most of the Cold War. Most of the rest of the world withheld support for American global leadership, of course, except when it served their particular interests, and now continues to question the legitimacy of American primacy. There are, of course, significant exceptions to this trend: Eastern European and Asian and Pacific powers who worry about the rise of Russia or China still look to the United States for protection and are therefore more inclined to accord it legitimacy and to support its actions, even in Iraq.

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become even larger. This military buildup occurs at a time when almost every nation in the world, except China, is cutting defense spending. As in the 1990s, the increased military power will affect how Americans view the utility of military force for resolving international problems. For Americans, more power, and especially more power relative to others, will likely produce, as it has in the past, a greater temptation to use it.

The increased willingness of the United States to use force has already generated much unease around the world, especially among traditional allies in Europe, and will continue to do so. In the wake of the Iraq war, the United States is suffering from a crisis of legitimacy. Part of the reason lies in America's actions in recent years and, especially, the way it has carried out those actions. But a large part of the problem transcends Iraq, and stems instead from the major geopolitical shift since the end of the Cold War. Nations that once depended on the United States for security, particularly the nations of Western

Still, the hostility of many European and others around the world to the United States' use of force poses a problem. Americans have not and will not be able to ignore this problem. Legitimacy matters, if only because the American people like to believe they are acting for legitimate purposes and are troubled, sometimes deeply, if other peoples accuse them of selfish, immoral, or otherwise illegitimate actions. The experiment of attempting to invade and then reconstruct Iraq without the blessing of Europe has been discomfiting, and will be even if the United States were eventually to succeed in Iraq.

There are sound reasons why the United States needs the general approval of allied democracies—reasons unrelated to international law, the strength of the Security Council, and the as-yet nonexistent fabric of the international order. Such allies, including those in Europe, matter because they are the core of the liberal, democratic world, and the liberal, democratic essence of the United States makes it difficult if not impossible for Americans to ignore the

concerns of its fellow liberal democracies. US foreign policy will inevitably be drawn by American liberalism to seek greater harmony with Europe and with other democracies around the world, if Europeans and other democratic peoples are open to such harmony. The alternative posture of stolidity will be difficult for the United States to sustain, for it is questionable whether the United States can operate effectively over the long term without the moral support and approval of the democratic world.

This is not only for the reasons that are usually cited. The United States does need the material cooperation of allies, of course, when it intervenes around the world. In particular, the United States needs to pool its resources with allies for reconstruction and development of countries in which the United States has intervened. In military terms, the United States can and does almost “go it alone” when it intervenes, even when allies are fully on board, as in Kosovo in the first Persian Gulf War, and even a half-century ago in the Korean War, despite its international sanction by the UN Security Council. But the American people’s willingness to support both military actions and the burdens of postwar occupations in the face of constant charges of illegitimacy from close democratic allies is more doubtful. The steady denial of international legitimacy by fellow democracies will eventually become debilitating and perhaps even paralyzing.

If Americans are compelled to build up their legitimacy reserves, where should they look to find it? How can the United States ensure that its actions—especially the use of military force—are seen as legitimate? In answering this question, we need to consider three aspects of legitimacy: the substance of the contemplated action, the procedure for deciding the action and, third, the normative basis that underlies both.

Self-Defense and Preemption

The legitimacy of using force depends importantly on the intended purpose as well as on whether that purpose is militarily achievable. It has long been a central tenet of international

politics that the use of force by states in self-defense is a fully legitimate exercise of military power. Indeed, the UN Charter speaks of the “inherent right” of states to use force to defend themselves against an armed attack—i.e., a right of all states *as* states, and not one granted to them by the Charter or any other treaty.

One issue that has been long debated, and which has reemerged in recent years, is whether states may take defensive military measures in anticipation of an attack—that is, whether the preemptive use of force can ever be justified on self-defense grounds. International lawyers have long argued (at least since the *Caroline* incident of 1837) that such anticipatory use of force in self-defense is legal and legitimate so long as the threat of an armed attack is clearly imminent. Or, as US Secretary of State Daniel Webster put it, when the “necessity of self-defence [is] instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation.”¹ This general principle of anticipatory self-defense was most recently reaffirmed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, as well as by a high-level panel of former senior officials Annan appointed to examine these issues in the wake of the UN disagreement over the Iraq war.² In an age of catastrophic terrorism, the legitimacy of striking terrorists preemptively is no longer in question.

In the wake of 9/11, the Bush administration pressed the issue of whether the “imminence” standard was adequate, arguing that the new threat environment required modifications to the standard. “We must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today’s adversaries,” the president’s *National Security Strategy* released in September 2002 stated.

The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the

enemy's attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.³

What was new about this argument was not the notion of using force preemptively. The United States has done so in the past, in efforts to forestall terrorist attacks (e.g., the Libya bombing of 1986 and the Iraq bombing of 1993) and respond to the threat of weapons of mass destruction (e.g., the Iraq bombing of 1998 and the Sudan bombing that same year). Rather, the novelty lay in the argument that such preemptive uses of force could be justified on self-defense grounds even when the threat was not clearly imminent. Indeed, the Bush administration argued that the United States could use force preemptively even without knowing whether a threat would material-

ize at all or, if it did, whether it would pose a direct threat to the United States.

ple gives a basis for preemptive action with a potentially legitimate argument on self-defense grounds. But such an argument is more difficult to make in the second instance, when the potential threat to one's own national security is less certain or real.

These theoretical issues came to a practical head in the debate over the Iraq war. Supporters of the war, including the Bush administration, argued that the invasion of Iraq was justified because Baghdad's development of weapons of mass destruction, combined with Saddam Hussein's record of past aggression, made his regime an emerging threat that had to be defeated before it had the chance to fully materialize. "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud," as Condoleezza Rice famously put it.⁴ For that reason, the preemptive use of force was justi-

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ize at all or, if it did, whether it would pose a direct threat to the United States.

This argument raises two issues—both of which go to the heart of the substantive and normative legitimacy of using force. The first concerns how, under these terms, to distinguish force used for self-defense purposes from force used for aggressive purposes. The administration acknowledged this difficulty when it warned that other nations should not "use preemption as a pretext for aggression." But if the imminence of an attack isn't the point of reference, how can one distinguish between these two uses of force—one clearly legitimate, the other clearly not? The second, related, issue concerns how one determines which of these nascent threats will emerge as palpable threats against specific states and which will threaten international security more broadly—for example, by shifting the regional balance of power or giving a state the ability to intimidate others. The former exam-

fied not only on prudential grounds but also as a legitimate form of self-defense. In contrast, many of the war's opponents maintained that in the absence of a threat that was truly imminent, alternative means (including beefed-up sanctions and continued international inspections of Iraq's weapons programs) must be pursued before the resort to force. They also argued that because Iraq did not pose a direct threat to the United States, any use of force required international support and authorization.

There can be little doubt that if the Iraq war had confirmed that Saddam's Iraq possessed the kinds of weapons programs many believed it did, and that if the postwar situation had been more peaceful and stable than it has been, judgments about the overall legitimacy of the war would not be what they are today. While the war is now seen by many as lacking legitimacy, a different outcome would have produced a different assessment of its value and validity. This underscores that the legitimacy of using force is

at least in part related to the efficacy of force in achieving its stated purpose.

Who Decides?

Substance, however, is only part of the basis of legitimacy. Procedure matters as well. And the critical issue, underscored by the preemption and Iraq debates, is who decides? Who decides whether a threat is sufficiently real or probable or grave to warrant preemptive action? Who decides whether the emerging threat is directed against a specific state or whether it threatens regional or international security more broadly? These questions point to the importance of procedural considerations for the legitimacy of using force—at least in cases without a traditional self-defense claim.

The longstanding answer to the question “who decides,” endorsed by the United States and others in theory if not always in practice, is that the UN Security Council decides. Under the UN Charter, the use of force is prohibited except in cases of self-defense or when explicitly authorized by the Security Council to deal with threats to or breaches of international peace and security. In the past 15 years or so, the Security Council has interpreted this prerogative to authorize the use of force evermore broadly—including to deal with internal conflicts and large-scale human rights abuses that it viewed as threats to international peace and security. And this broad mandate to authorize coercive action, including the use of force, was reaffirmed by Kofi Annan’s high-level panel, which in its 2004 report argued that the Security Council may authorize force against a state “whether the threat is occurring now, in the imminent future or more distant future; whether it involves the State’s own actions or those of non-State actors it harbors or supports; or whether it takes the form of an act or omission, an actual or potential act of violence or simply a challenge to the Council’s authority.”⁵

The reality, however, is that the Security Council is deeply divided over these issues and in many, if not most, instances will not authorize any coercive action, let alone the use of force. Among its five permanent members there is no consensus on what constitutes a

threat to international peace and security and no agreement on how to respond even to those threats on which it does agree. From Rwanda to Kosovo to Darfur, and from Iraq to North Korea to Iran, the Security Council has failed to act because it was split over whether and how these situations constituted threats and what the appropriate response should be. Even strong advocates of the United Nations have admitted that the Security Council has often fallen short. (“The Council’s decisions have often been less than consistent, less than persuasive and less than fully responsive to very real state and human security needs,” acknowledged the high-level panel.) And proposals to reform the Security Council—by making it more representative of the UN membership, expanding its numbers, or taking the veto away from the permanent members—are not only doomed politically, but even if miraculously approved would hardly facilitate the search for consensus or decisions on timely and effective action.

The paralysis of the Security Council is thus both a reality and unlikely to change any time soon. From the United States’ perspective, the central problem is its membership, which, among the five permanent members, includes two countries that are governed in ways that are antithetical to everything America stands for. While the interests of the United States, Russia, and China may occasionally coincide—as in the early 1990s, when the Security Council united in response to threats from Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti—on today’s most pressing issues, their interests diverge. America and its democratic friends are deeply concerned when governments engage in the wholesale slaughter or ethnic cleansing of groups of their people or when regimes passively allow others to engage in such horrific behavior. In contrast, Russia and China have given priority to maintaining good relations with such regimes—be it Milošević’s Serbia in the 1990s or al-Bashir’s Sudan today—abandoning those who are being “cleansed,” raped, mutilated, and murdered by the millions to their fate. America and its democratic friends care deeply when rogue regimes flout international treaty obligations and set

out to build a nuclear bomb with which to threaten and intimidate countries around the region and the world. Again, Moscow and Beijing are more interested in maintaining good relations with Pyongyang and Tehran, thereby thwarting efforts by America and its allies to prevent and reverse the nuclearization of these unstable regions.

Sovereignty as Responsibility

These differences reflect the very distinct natures of authoritarian and democratic regimes, which also differ in their conceptions of sovereignty, the issue on which UN members are most divided. Russia, China, and a host of developing nations continue to view sovereignty as the defining principle of international affairs, and they steadfastly maintain that a country's borders demarcate an international no-go zone. What happens within the

We must adapt our standards for intervention—as well as the decision-making structures for questions of whether to intervene—to the transformation in the nature of sovereignty. Rather than conceiving of sovereignty as a government's inherent right to do as it pleases, we must recognize that it entails real responsibilities—both with respect to those who live within the state and with regard to internal developments that can affect those who live outside it. This changing conception of sovereignty—from conceiving sovereignty as a right to conceiving it as a responsibility—has become more widely accepted in recent years. There has been growing recognition that states have a *responsibility to protect* their own citizens from genocide, mass killing, and other gross violations of human rights.⁶ But states also have a *responsibility to prevent* the emergence of security threats within their territory—such as

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borders of a state is strictly the concern of the regime that governs that territory, not of anyone else. Others, including the United States and its democratic friends, believe that insisting on absolute sovereignty ignores a basic reality of our increasingly interconnected age: i.e., that the principal threats to security today come from within states rather than from their external behavior. Indeed, the last three wars the United States has fought were provoked by internal conditions and actions—Serb ethnic cleansing of its Albanian minority in Kosovo, the Taliban's harboring of Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, and Saddam Hussein's purported development of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Clearly, when developments within one state can profoundly affect the security and well-being of peoples in other states, the only practical way for countries to safeguard their security is to interfere in the internal affairs of those states.

developments relating to weapons of mass destruction (like their acquisition or the failure to secure weapons, materials, or deadly agents against possible theft or diversion); the harboring, supporting, or training of terrorists; or environmental dangers (like allowing the spread of dangerous diseases or the destruction of the rain forest).⁷ Because in each of these instances what happens inside a state has consequences beyond its borders; they are a legitimate, sometimes vital, concern of any nation that is or could be affected by a sovereign government's actions or inaction.

The emergence of a new norm of state responsibility raises the important question of what should happen when states fail to meet their responsibility. The world's leaders, meeting at the United Nations' 60th anniversary summit in 2005, made clear that when a state is unable or unwilling to fulfill its fundamental responsibility to protect its own people, then the onus

for action shifts to the international community. “We are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council,” the leaders declared, “should peaceful means prove inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations.”⁸ Similarly, when a state fails to meet its other major responsibility, to prevent the emergence of threats within its borders that pose dangers beyond them, that responsibility falls to others. And the most effective way for doing so will often involve preventive action. Indeed, the best time to defeat many of the new threats is before they become imminent—*before* enough fissile material has been produced to make nuclear weapons, *before* weapons in unsecured sites or deadly diseases in laboratories have been stolen, *before* terrorists have been fully trained or are able to carry out their plots, *before* large-scale killing or ethnic cleansing has occurred, *before* a deadly pathogen has mutated and spread around the globe.

Of course in many of these cases, military intervention is not the only, or even the preferred, means for dealing with the emerging threat. There often are good alternatives. At the same time, force will sometimes be necessary to address these new threats. And when it is, it often is best used early, before threats have been fully formed, since timely use of force will likely reduce the associated costs and enhance the probability of success.

The Democratic Alternative

Who, then, should decide when intervention is warranted? Until the UN members, particularly the Security Council’s permanent members, fully embrace the logic of state responsibility, leaving the decision-making authority solely with the United Nations is a recipe for indecision and inaction—and increased insecurity. Instead of the United Nations, the decision to intervene promptly to keep small threats from turning into big ones must lie with those who take seriously the notion of sovereignty as responsibility: the world’s democracies (including in particular the United States and its major democratic partners in Europe and Asia). Democracies know—in a way that nondemoc-

racies do not—that real sovereignty, like real legitimacy, resides with the people rather than with the states. That is why the decision of states to intervene in the affairs in another state can be legitimate only if it is rendered by the people’s democratically chosen representatives rather than the personal whims of autocrats or oligarchs.

Of course, there is no guarantee that the democracies will always agree on the circumstances and manner of an intervention. Regional differences, historical experiences, and power differentials all influence democratic states’ perspectives on questions of intervention. Disagreement is therefore possible, if not likely. At the same time, democracies are undoubtedly more likely to agree among themselves on these issues than would a group that included nondemocracies. That much is clear from recent history. Within 24 hours of the 9/11 attacks, NATO invoked Article 5, thereby committing itself to the collective defense of the United States—including, were Washington to decide, by conducting the military operation in Afghanistan (which is currently under NATO command). While the Security Council also responded swiftly to the attack, it only implicitly endorsed the Afghan campaign, and more than a few UN members subsequently questioned its legitimacy. More to the point, perhaps, is the Kosovo campaign of 1999, which demonstrated that there are indeed circumstances when the NATO democracies can agree on the use of force even when the UN Security Council cannot.

The NATO precedent, we believe, suggests that for all their differences, democracies are more likely to agree on the use of force in certain circumstances than any larger grouping of states that included nondemocracies. Indeed, for that reason we strongly support the creation of a global organization of democracies to cooperate on matters of common concern. Such an organization would include not only Western democracies that have long cooperated within NATO and other security alliances but also India, Brazil, South Africa, and other democracies from around the world.⁹ Of course, creating a Concert of Democracies will

take time; so until a new organization uniting the world's true democracies has been built, decisions on using force for reasons other than self-defense would have to rest with the North American and European democracies united in NATO—augmented, we would hope, by other critical partner nations like Australia, Japan, South Korea, Sweden, and similar like-minded allies. Many will object to this proposal as drawing the decision-making circle either too narrowly or too broadly. But their proffered alternatives are worse, which is why it is very much in the interest of the United States as well as the other major democracies to make the proposed structure work.

One set of critics, coming mainly from the left and from abroad, argues that decisions on the use of force by a small number of the world's nearly 200 countries are by definition illegitimate. But this argument equates legitimacy

more votes, be legitimate in a way that an action supported by the world's democracies would not? If so, that is a notion of legitimacy that we cannot accept as, well, legitimate.

Another set of critics, mainly on the right, argues that it is unacceptable to give other democracies, even our longstanding friends in Europe and Asia, a say (let alone a possible veto) over decisions to use force, both because it would wrongly constrain the United States and because it would render the use of force ineffective. According to this argument, under our Constitution, the ultimate decision on whether or not to employ the armed forces rests with the commander in chief, and there it must remain. Moreover, these critics argue, from Kosovo to Afghanistan to Iraq, the application of military power has proven most effective when the United States is in complete command and control of all the forces and

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with universality, a common conceit of UN spokesmen and all too many of the world's countries. It reduces the concept of legitimacy to a procedural question—the number of states or votes one can marshal in support of a given action will determine whether it is legitimate. Under this approach, the nature of the action itself or of the states consenting to it matter little, if at all. This is a deeply flawed conception of legitimacy. Surely, the rightness or wrongness of a proposed course of action inheres, at least in part, the nature of the action being contemplated. Indeed, the lack of broad support for forceful action that is necessary to reverse a terrible wrong such as genocide or widespread humanitarian atrocities would hardly render inaction legitimate. Similarly, it surely matters as much for legitimacy *which* states support an action as *how many* support it. Would anyone seriously argue that an action supported by authoritarian regimes would, by garnering

least effective when other nations have a voice in their strategic, operational, and tactical use. With very few exceptions, our allies hesitate to commit their military forces. Even when they finally agree on the need to use force, they don't bring much to the table, and what they do bring often comes with a requirement of national approval for how the forces are used, as well as other caveats. In most instances, these critics contend, it's just not worth it.

We don't disagree. We don't expect, nor would support, any president handing over his ultimate authority as commander in chief to another body or country. But as a matter of prudence, we believe any president would be well advised to gain the support of US democratic allies when deciding to employ force in situations that are not strictly for our self-defense. For reasons stated earlier, the United States needs the legitimacy that such support

confers, and we should always work hard in such situations to obtain that support before embarking on a major military operation. Making clear that we want NATO and its global democratic partners to be involved in decisions on using force in these instances will help set a new standard for legitimacy.

Of course, Iraq showed that our partners will not always agree with our proposed course of action. There may come times when we will have to use force over the objections of some, many, or even most of our partners. The fact of their disagreement should weigh heavily in our decision making—at the very least prompting us to reexamine our assumptions and assessments carefully. But such differences cannot constitute a definitive veto over our actions any more than our own qualms about actions a partner nation (or nations) is contemplating should constitute a veto over theirs.

At the same time, our history of cooperation in NATO makes clear that having a strong organizational structure for debating and reaching decisions on matters as important as the use of force is often more of a help than a hindrance. When an action or issue is thoroughly debated, assessed, and reassessed, it only enhances the quality of the ultimate decision. We rely on such debate domestically to make our democracies healthy and dynamic, and we have relied on debate within NATO over the decades to chart a wise and effective course to fight and win the Cold War. We should continue to look to partners within and beyond this institution to help us reach wise and effective decisions on the use of force in the future.

Of course, if the United States commits itself to working with its democratic partners on these central issues, that gives allies, too, a major responsibility. They must come to the table prepared not only to debate Washington but also fully prepared to implement the decisions that are reached. And by “prepared” we mean both capable of deploying a significant force to the most likely loci of conflict (i.e., far away from Europe) and demonstrably willing to employ force when necessary and appropri-

ate. The essential deal to be struck between the United States and its democratic partners on the use of force must be a true bargain—a two-way street. While Washington would commit to involve NATO and its global partners in decisions, the NATO and global partners would commit to bring real capabilities to the table and a willingness to use them when a decision to do so is reached.

The viability of this bargain depends on how well it works in practice. NATO has worked well because the allies have long valued what that institution does for them and for their security. For most members, maintaining the unity and effectiveness of the Alliance became at least as important as winning the debate on a particular issue. The Alliance even devised mechanisms for members that wished to express reservations on a particular course of action but that did not want to block an action supported by a large majority. The silence procedure and the footnote are two such mechanisms; an agreement to endorse the action but not participate in it (as Greece did, for example, during NATO’s Kosovo war) is another. In each of these instances, alliance members with a minority viewpoint placed the value of the institution and collaborative decision making above having every decision come out to their liking.

When it comes to the use of force, the American and global debates often present a narrow choice between going with the United Nations or going it alone. This is a false choice. There is an effective and viable alternative to multilateral paralysis and unilateral action—working with our democratic partners in NATO and around the world to meet and defeat the global challenges of our age.

Endnotes

- ¹ <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/britain/br-1842d.htm>
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- ³ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington: The White House, September 2002), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nscl/nss.pdf>, p. 15.
- ⁴ <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/09/08/iraq.debate/>
- ⁵ *A More Secure World*, p. 63.
- ⁶ Evans-Sahoun Commission.
- ⁷ For a similar argument, confined to weapons of mass destruction, see Lee Feinstein and Anne-Marie Slaughter, "A Duty to Prevent," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83 (January-February 2004), pp. 136-150.
- ⁸ "2005 World Summit Outcomes," United Nations General Assembly, A/60/L.1
- ⁹ Cf. Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, "Democracies of the World, Unite," *The American Interest* (Winter 2007), pp. 5-15.

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