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Geopolitics, Grand Strategy and the Bush Doctrine

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ABSTRACT

Geopolitics is about the largest scale geographical specification of political matters. Geopolitical reasoning provides the spatial framings within which grand strategy is constructed. The Bush doctrine, elaborated in response to the events of September 11th 2001 and its formulation of a “Global War on Terror” draws heavily on antecedent formulations from both the first Bush administration and the Project for a New American Century. But in doing so it both misconstrues the nature of the events of September 11th and attempts a grand strategy that is flawed. It is flawed both because of its failure to understand the geography of terror and, given the Bush administration’s flat denials that America is an empire, a reluctance to learn lessons from imperial history and adopt appropriate strategies and force structures to accomplish its ostensible goals.

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Geopolitics, Grand Strategy and the Bush Doctrine

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Geopolitics, Grand Strategy and the Bush Doctrine

"The United States may be only the latest in a long line of countries that is unable to place sensible limits on its fears and aspirations."

Robert Jervis¹

GEOPOLITICS AND STRATEGY

Geopolitics usually refers to the largest scale understanding of the arrangements of world power. Invoking the term suggests both matters of importance and their geographical arrangements which in turn situate and constrain states in their rivalries and struggles for power. Strategy is about the meshing of ends and means, of attempting to attain ends with an economy of effort and the effective use of the means available. Frequently the two meet in a discussion of "grand strategy" understood as the pursuit of the largest scale objectives by practitioners of statecraft. In Colin Dueck's terms "'Grand strategy' involves a self-conscious identification and prioritisation of foreign policy goals; an identification of existing and potential resources; and a selection of a plan which uses these resources to meet those goals."² Thinking about American hegemony in these terms is especially apt in an era that is termed a war on terror; an era presided over by the self proclaimed "war president" George W. Bush.

This paper examines the geopolitical logic of the "Bush doctrine" that drives the National Security Strategy of the United States of 2002 and subsequent policy statements. It is crucially important to take the doctrinal statements of George W. Bush's administration seriously. If one reads them with assumptions that they are either naïve, or some form of ideological smokescreen, then the possibility that the speechwriters and intellectuals who form the core of George Bush's foreign and defence policy team really aspire to what they claim gets occluded. Either invoking conspiracy thinking or the intimation of ulterior motives may be very tempting for all sorts of reasons, but thinking in these modes about contemporary events is a mistake if it suggests that the public doctrine is a deliberate deception. There is a simple logic to the various articulations of "the Bush doctrine" that is

¹ Robert Jervis "Understanding the Bush Doctrine" Political Science Quarterly 118(3) 2003. p. 365.

² Colin Dueck "Ideas and Alternatives in American Grand Strategy, 2000-2004" Review of International Studies 30(4) 2004, p. 512.

both obvious and important. It behoves scholars and analysts of geopolitics in particular to tackle this logic directly.

The detailed history of the thinkers and policy makers who dominated American policy in the first Bush administration, and who have subsequently re-emerged from the think-tank and corporate boardrooms to take up the reins of power once again - the Vulcans in their self preferred terminology - is beyond the scope of this chapter.³ But an overview of their long-term thinking is essential as there are notable continuities in geopolitical thinking since the end of the cold war. It is also important to note that the Bush doctrine is not necessarily internally coherent, well meshed with other aspects of the Bush administration's policies, nor is it necessarily obvious from the doctrine how to conduct policy in any particular set of circumstances. But it does provide an overarching conceptualisation of how the world is organised, America's role in that world, and how American power is to be understood and used in that so specified context. It is in other words a geopolitical discourse of considerable power. The Bush doctrine was elaborated in the aftermath of September 11th in response to the events of that day drawing on existing geopolitical thinking and focused on "war" as the primary response to what were understood as new "global" dangers. Both the specifications of global and war are highly questionable, but they provided the key elements in American foreign and defence policy from late 2001 through the rest of George W. Bush's first administration.

Little of this geopolitical thinking is very new, although some innovations were obviously needed in a hurry in September 2001 given the novelty of Osama Bin Laden's tactics. The key themes of American supremacy, the willingness to maintain overwhelming military superiority over potential rivals and the proffered option of preventative war to stop potential threats from even emerging, were all sketched out in the first Bush presidency at the end of the cold war in the period following the war with Iraq in 1991 when Dick Cheney was Defence Secretary, and Colin Powell and Paul Wolfowitz were at the heart of Washington's defence bureaucracy. The related key assumption that America has the right to assert its power to reshape the rest of the world to its liking also carries over from the early 1990s.

This paper revisits the first Bush presidency to look at the debate then about what American strategy ought to be in the aftermath of the cold war. The point about pre-eminence not being new is important; the logic of the Bush doctrine is obviously traceable to the end of

³ See in detail James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* New York: Viking 2004; Stefan Halper and Jonathon Clarke *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Gary Dorrien *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* New York: Routledge 2004.

the cold war and the triumphalism that pervaded the neo-conservative thinkers at the heart of the American foreign and defence establishment. As it turned out these people were once again in power on September 11th and the resulting "Bush doctrine", clearly outlined in the 2002 National Security Doctrine of the United States of America, bears many of the hallmarks of the antecedent documents both in the first Bush administration and in the writings emanating from various lobby groups and think tanks during the Clinton presidency.⁴

AFTER THE COLD WAR

With the end of the cold war and the demise of the Soviet threat, planners in the American military establishment developed a series of ideas about the role for American forces in the new circumstances. In August 1990, just as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was occurring, George Bush announced a new strategy for American forces in a speech to the Aspen institute. Announcing that overall the US forces would be cut by 25%, he argued that the new role involved preserving international stability and having the ability to intervene in regional threats to that stability. Various known as the "Aspen Strategy", the "New National Security Strategy" or a "Strategy for a New World Order" these statements outlined US military policy and priorities in the post-cold war world where a superpower conflict was seen as unlikely.⁵

The emphasis in this strategy was on military contingencies and the need to be prepared to fight a war with a well-armed Third World power. Obviously the war against Iraq in 1991 was a dress rehearsal for such a role for the US military in promoting "the New World Order". It was also, in retrospect, seen as the crucible for restructuring the US military organisation. The mobilisation and deployment provided the opportunity to cut across traditional bureaucratic "turf" and promote the integration of the services in new ways.⁶ It also allowed the extensive field trials of the new generation of high technology weapons including stealth fighters, "smart" bombs and cruise missiles in non-nuclear roles.

⁴ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America Washington: The White House September 2002.

⁵ See in more detail O. Tunander, "Bush's Brave New World: A New World Order -- A New Military Strategy" Bulletin of Peace Proposals 22(4), 1991, 355-68.

⁶ H.G. Summers, On Strategy II: A Critical Analysis of the Gulf War New York: Dell, 1992.

These new strategic ideas were elaborated in official documents in the Defence Department, then under Secretary Dick Cheney; the modified geopolitical priorities and force restructurings were fairly clear in outline.⁷ First is the reduction in nuclear weapons, most obvious in the removal of tactical weapons from naval vessels, and the consolidation of a smaller strategic arsenal combined with continued Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) type developments in a new strategic configuration. Second was a continued presence of land forces in Europe and an Atlantic focus of both naval and heavy land based forces. The navy continued to dominate the Pacific region, albeit with a reduced number of carrier groups, while a flexible contingency force was planned along with the strategic transport capabilities to move it rapidly into any arena of conflict. Naval weapons such as the Seawolf class of submarines and the focus on anti-submarine warfare designed to defeat the Soviet navy were no longer deemed relevant; carrier task forces were elevated in importance to “project power” anywhere round the globe.

The role of advanced technology in the success of the Gulf war also reinforced emphasis on maintaining a technological advantage over any likely adversary. Hence SDI and stealth programs were likely to be a keystone to any future armed force. So too was the continuation of reliance on reserves to flesh out the intervention forces. At least one prominent strategist at the time, Harry Summers, argued that restructuring forces to rely on reserves in time of war was important in garnering crucial political support for the military action in the Gulf in 1991. Further he argued that the Gulf War and the planning that led to it through the 1980s has marked a shift, in Clausewitzian terms, from the strategic defensive of the cold war to the strategic offensive in the post cold war period. This marked, he suggested, a crucial reassertion of political will in the prosecution of foreign policy.⁸

Early in 1992 the scenarios that the force planning was based on became a series of New York Times headline news stories.⁹ Among the crisis contingencies being considered were another Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, a North Korean attack on South Korea, a coup in the Philippines, a Panamanian coup threatening the canal zone, and a war between Russia and Lithuania, Poland and Byelorussia with NATO intervention. Each of these would require flexible US contingency forces and the possibility, in at least the

⁷ Dick Cheney, Report of the Secretary of Defence to the President and Congress Washington, Department of Defense 1991; Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Military Net Assessment Washington, Department of Defense, 1991.

⁸ Summers, On Strategy II.

⁹ P.E. Tyler, "As Fears of a Big War Fades, Military Plans for Little Ones" New York Times 3 January 1992. p. 1; P.E. Tyler, "Pentagon Imagines New Enemies To Fight in Post-Cold-War Era" New York Times 17 February, 1992 p. 1. P.E. Tyler, "War in 1990's: New Doubts" New York Times 18 February, 1992, p. 1.

Lithuania scenario, of substantial heavy conventional forces. Critics argued that the Iraqi scenario was particularly far fetched given the recent destruction of the bulk of Iraq's military potential.

The clear emphasis in Pentagon planning, and in the 1994-1999 Defense Planning Guidance document in particular, on preventing the emergence of any other state as a rival to the US' global supremacy, generated considerable public debate.¹⁰ While critics condemned the scenarios as unlikely and mere justifications for inflated military budgets, the more interesting criticisms suggested that the more fundamental flaw in this kind of planning was the presumption that a US military force could or should unilaterally enforce a global order. Claiming victory in the cold war and in the Gulf war the Defense Planning Guidance suggests that the latter was a "defining event in U.S. global leadership". While the Bush administration's opposition to a European security arrangement without US participation is not new, the Pentagon planning document suggests that any attempt by European powers, a rearmed Japan or a rebuilt Russian military to reassert regional leadership would be regarded suspiciously by the US military.

Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defense strategy and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power. These regions include Western Europe, East Asia, the territory of the former Soviet Union and South West Asia.¹¹

Three additional objectives were enumerated to support this overall position. First, the US should provide "the leadership necessary to establish and protect a new order that holds the promise of convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture to protect their legitimate interests". Beyond that "in non-defense areas, we must account sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order." Thirdly, and in a most blunt assertion of global

¹⁰ P.E. Tyler, "U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop" New York Times 8 March, 1992, p. 1. P.E. Tyler, "Senior U.S. Officials Assail A 'One Superpower Goal' " New York Times 11 March, 1992, p. 1.

¹¹ Department of Defense Defense Planning Guidance for the Fiscal Years 1994-1999 Washington 1992. (Excerpts of the leaked 18 February draft as reprinted in The New York Times 8 March 1992).

supremacy, the document argues that "we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role". Coupled with military advice that "being as good as a potential adversary is not enough; winning means not only exceeding the strengths of the opponent, but dominating him so completely that the conflict is ended early with favourable results and minimal casualties", the claim to global supremacy could not be clearer.¹²

In its critics' eyes the argument for a new military "Pax Americana" was more likely to raise fears of American hegemony in many places rather than reassure other states of the viability and desirability of the new world order, none of which augured well for a long-term political arrangement conducive to peace. There was no conception of the economic dimensions of either international economic issues or the long term domestic budgetary constraints on military procurements in the world's largest debtor nation.¹³ In contrast the possibilities of multilateral alliance systems and an enhanced role for the United Nations and regional collective security arrangements were ignored. Security was understood as the unilateral imposition of US military force to maintain order in the international political system.

It can of course be argued in defence of the Pentagon that their job is only to develop scenarios of future possible conflicts and plan forces accordingly. While the White House quickly distanced itself from the more controversial formulations in 1992, and some months later the Pentagon removed the offending "one superpower" section from the "guidance" document, the lack of a wider political vision in the US administration left room open for these scenarios and allowed strategic and geopolitical discourses to dominate political discussion. As one commentator at the time noted, in the absence of a clear political rationale for global politics after the cold war "...the defense debate has become a principal vehicle for discussing the much larger issue of the place of the United States in the post-cold war world".¹⁴ Indeed the rationale for global politics and what might be done now that superpower rivalry had faded away was little more than "we won" and "we intend to keep matters pretty much as they are for as long as we can". With the arrival of the Clinton administrations these explicit formulations of geopolitical supremacy faded, but the use of military force abroad continued in Somalia, Bosnia and elsewhere.

¹² P.E. Tyler, "Plans for Small Wars Replace Fear of Big One" New York Times 3 February, 1992, p. 6.

¹³ J. Chance, "The Pentagon's Superpower Fantasy" New York Times 14 March 1992.

¹⁴ P.J. Garrity and S.K. Weiner, "U.S. Defense Strategy After the Cold War" The Washington Quarterly 15(2), 1992. 57-76.

THE PROJECT FOR A NEW AMERICAN CENTURY

The neo-conservative intellectuals, out of power in Washington after Bill Clinton's election, continued their advocacy of American primacy and formed a number of lobbying organisations, the most high profile of which was "The Project for a New American Century" (PNAC). This organisation published a series of reports and open letters and was associated with a number of books produced by leading neo-conservative thinkers. Most notable was their 2000 report on Rebuilding America's Defenses which comes closest to a blue print for the future.¹⁵ The context of the late 1990s suggested to the PNAC authors that the happy situation of American supremacy gained by what they considered America's victory in the cold war might not last:

At present the United States faces no global rival. America's grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible. There are, however, potentially powerful states dissatisfied with the current situation and eager to change it, if they can, in directions that endanger the relatively peaceful, prosperous and free condition the world enjoys today. Up to now, they have been deterred from doing so by the capability and global presence of American military power. But, as that power declines, relatively and absolutely, the happy conditions that follow from it will be inevitably undermined.¹⁶

The PNAC report states that its approach explicitly builds on the documents from the latter part of the period when Dick Cheney was secretary of defense: "The Defense Policy Guidance (DPG) drafted in the early months of 1992 provided a blueprint for maintaining U.S. pre-eminence, precluding the rise of a great power rival, and shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests."¹⁷ Looking ahead to the next presidency in a period of budget surpluses, which in PNAC's opinion obviated any financial reasons for constraining the defence budget, the authors offered their report as providing input into the next "Quadrennial Defense Review" that the new administration would be expected to produce soon after the election. This PNAC blueprint was an explicit attempt to provide continuity with the earlier Cheney defence department planning in the first Bush

¹⁵ Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources For a New Century A Report of The Project for the New American Century, Washington; September 2000.

¹⁶ Rebuilding America's Defences p. i.

¹⁷ Rebuilding America's Defences p. ii.

administration. As such it provides a loosely consistent set of priorities and a geopolitical framework for a grand strategy based on military supremacy against any potential state rivals to American power.

The language suggests an imperial presence, and a world attuned to a Pax Americana: Today, the United States has an unprecedented strategic opportunity. It faces no immediate great-power challenge; it is blessed with wealthy, powerful and democratic allies in every part of the world; it is in the midst of the longest economic expansion in its history; and its political and economic principles are almost universally embraced. At no time in history has the international security order been as conducive to American interests and ideals. The challenge for the coming century is to preserve and enhance this "American peace".¹⁸

To counter potential challenges to this Pax Americana the PNAC authors suggested that American forces needed to be expanded. Four core themes were essential to the future defence policy which they asserted needed to simultaneously:

- defend the American homeland;
- fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theater wars;
- perform the "constabulary" duties associated with shaping the security environment in critical regions;
- transform U.S. forces to exploit the "revolution in military affairs;"

This is an ambitious list for a military that PNAC argued needed to be expanded from 1.4m to 1.6m active service personnel. But by maintaining nuclear superiority and moving forces permanently to South East Europe and South East Asia the task could supposedly be accomplished. In addition selective modernization of the forces could be accomplished by cancelling some expensive planned hardware innovations including the Crusader howitzer system and maximizing the use of new technologies to ensure the continued supremacy of American conventional forces. In addition cyberspace and outer space were arenas that needed American control. Missile defences were also seen as essential to protect the American homeland and bases abroad. All of which required an increase of defence spending to between 3.5% and 3.8% of GNP. "The true cost of not meeting our defense requirements will be a lessened capacity for American global leadership and, ultimately, the loss of a global security order that is uniquely friendly to American principles and prosperity."¹⁹

¹⁸ Rebuilding America's Defences p. iv.

¹⁹ Rebuilding America's Defences p. v.

Complaining that the Clinton administration had cut \$426bn from defence equipment investments, and that none of the ten divisions were fully combat ready, the PNAC authors bemoan the fact that military facilities are still in Germany when the security dangers are in South East Europe. The language of crises pervades the PNAC document, the opportunity to rebuild American power will be missed if the next president fails to adequately fund the defence forces and ensure the dominance of American arms into the future. The unipolar moment may pass and America face rivals for its hegemony if military readiness slips further and equipment and personnel further neglected. The rhetoric is familiar from earlier days of cold war fears and from alarm at post-Vietnam force reductions; the late 1970s were replete with alarms about relative weaknesses and the need to rebuild the military; many of the neo-conservatives who subsequently became influential were part of the Reagan presidencies where military spending was increased and weapons systems acquired.²⁰ The suggestion that American military supremacy won the cold war is a pervasive tendency in the rationalizations for new attempts to assert the supremacy. What is notably absent in all this discussion is any rival that might make American military dominance questionable. But, so the logic of the argument goes, ensuring that one is not even tempted to try is the only reliable way to assert Pax Americana. And yes, the PNAC report explicitly uses the phrase suggesting parallels with Rome and Britain in earlier periods.

Homeland defence takes priority in the PNAC document, especially the need for missile defence so that states which acquire ballistic missiles cannot deter American military action. This is the first priority. But the military must also preserve and expand the zone of democratic peace, where democratic states which apparently according to much of the American school of international relations thinking do not fight each other, and are in one way or another aligned with the US, to ensure global prosperity. Where the forces in the cold war were primarily concerned with a conflict with the USSR in Europe, now in the post cold war they are concerned with fighting regional wars, but in a context where the potential strategic rivalries are focused in Asia. There is a very different geography to American power now, and one that requires a refocused strategic posture. Constabulary duties, such as the deployment of American forces in the Balkans, are a clear part of the Pentagon's mandate too and require suitable force structures. Nuclear weapons upgrades were apparently forgotten by the Clinton administration which is castigated for its negotiation of the supposedly ineffective comprehensive test ban treaty which Congress never actually ratified. Increasing the number

²⁰ Simon Dalby *Creating the Second Cold War: The Discourse of Politics* London: Pinter and New York: Guilford, 1990.

of active forces and reducing reliance on reserve forces is seen as important, especially if constabulary duties are taken seriously.

There is a rich irony in the warning in "Rebuilding America's Defenses" where the authors wonder about the utility of Aircraft carriers in the navy of the future. Will the navy carriers be rendered redundant by unmanned airplanes and guided missiles, in much the same way as carrier planes rendered battleships redundant at Pearl Harbor? Given that the PNAC document does not mention terrorism as a threat to American power, the adage about planning to fight the last war seems strangely apt. Alarm over the revolution in military affairs and the technological capabilities of potential future foes ignored the foes that actually did strike America on September 11th 2001. The focus solely on rival states is noteworthy. It also structures a companion volume that Robert Kagan and William Kristol edited in 2000 that focused on potential threats to American power. Once again the rhetorical traditions of American thinking are reprised, this time in a volume entitled Present Dangers.²¹ But states are the focus, and the rise of non-state threats are noticeably absent from the thinking.

A crucial dimension of this is how effectively this discussion of the future of American defence excludes from consideration global problems of economic and environmental matters and international humanitarian issues. The discursive structure on which all these play is the spatialised separation of cause and effect. Security problems are external to the fundamental operation of the essential elements of the Western system. Military threats are not in any way related to matters of the economic injustices caused by the operation of the global economy. Existing boundaries are to a large extent considered legal and just even where they are not precisely demarcated (as in the case of the Iraq-Kuwait dispute). Responsibility for the difficulties to which military strategies are the answer are designated as originating in an external unrelated space. This radical separation, the spatialised "Othering" of threats, acts to perpetuate geopolitical knowledge practices that emphasize conflict and militarised understandings of security.

THE BUSH DOCTRINE

Subsequently, the Bush doctrine formulated in response to the 911 attacks incorporated many of these themes. The most obvious and salient geopolitical points about the Bush doctrine are

²¹ Robert Kagan and William Kristol (eds) Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000.

simple but very important. None more so than the immediate assumption that the struggle against terror was a matter best prosecuted as a matter of warfare rather than by diplomacy and police action. Once the events of September 11th were interpreted as a “global” war on terror then the geopolitical categories from the first Bush administration and the PNAC documents shaped the subsequent prosecution of American policy. The specific geographies of Al Qaeda and struggles in the Gulf region were swept aside by the geographically inappropriate specifications of global struggle and the discursive repertoire of global security was awkwardly applied to the new circumstances in late 2001.

But as shown here these themes are not just an innovation of the second Bush presidency. Neither are they completely divorced from the prosecution of American power in the Clinton era. The shift in American thinking after the cold war from an overall policy of containment to one of enlargement in the Clinton years was a reversal of the spatial direction of policy. Instead of a negative formulation of holding the line against a supposedly expanding communist world, the democratic peace arguments supported a policy of democratization, of expanding the remit of liberal democracy in many places. Incorporating recalcitrant powers into the international trading and treaty organizations was part of the expansion of American influence in the 1990s. The logic of this was simply that democracies don't fight each other and that security is best arranged as incorporation within the international system rather than autarkic separation, a matter that has some substantial support in the pertinent scholarly literature.²² This zone of democratic peace, to use the PNAC terminology, is seen as the core of America's power; its expansion key to the logic of the Clinton administration, one usually more eager to use diplomatic than military power to effect its extension.

In the aftermath of the attack on September 11th the Bush administration issued a series of statements and speeches on what quickly became the "global war on terror" (GWOT). The key elements in a new strategy were collected and issued as the "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" in September 2002. Effectively this document acts as a codification of the "Bush doctrine". It is rich in American rhetoric, and in many ways can be read more as an assertion of American identity and aspiration, rather than as a strategic doctrine.²³ The restatement of Americanismo, a virulent nationalism, is crucial to understanding the operation of power in the second, and now the third, Bush

²² Etel Solingen Regional Orders at Century's Dawn: Global and Domestic Influences on Grand Strategy New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998.

²³ Anatol Lieven America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

administration. Although ironically in that third administration the Clinton themes of democratization abroad by political means are now once again being grafted onto the Bush doctrine by Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State suggesting another continuity in American thinking that is reasserting itself after the difficulties resulting from the military focus in the Bush doctrine.²⁴

Free trade, free markets, liberty and peace are the supposed universals in the National Security Strategy document and America is situated alongside all states seeking such goals. The obvious virtue of this is reprised in Fukuyama style language of the demise of ideological competitors. But terrorism is worldwide too, and the homeland is vulnerable. Hence a new Department of Homeland Security that focuses on protecting America first and foremost. Regional partners in the hunt for terrorists and the spread of democracy are also a part of the strategy. The danger posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is also a priority, and states that might supply them to terrorist organizations must be prevented from doing so. Africa's wars must be constrained, porous borders fixed to ensure that violence does not spread. Rogue states that hate America and everything it stands for have emerged and the danger of weapons of mass destruction there is paramount. These are weapons of intimidation and threats to neighbours now, no longer the cold war weapons of last resort.

Crucially the NSS argues that in these cases deterrence no longer works: "Traditional concepts of deterrence will not work against a terrorist enemy whose avowed tactics are wanton destruction and the targeting of innocents; whose so-called soldiers seek martyrdom in death and whose most potent protection is statelessness. The overlap between states that sponsor terror and those that pursue WMD compels us to action".²⁵ This is of course half the logic for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The NSS however is careful to suggest that ultimately such action is defensive. Invoking international law and the right of self-defence it argues that, given the changed circumstances of these threats, adaptation is necessary. "We must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today's adversaries. Rogue states and terrorists do not seek to attack us using conventional means".²⁶ Hence waiting for unambiguous evidence of imminent threat is no longer possible; pre-emption may have to come much earlier.

²⁴ See "A Conversation with Condoleezza Rice" *The American Interest* 1(1) 2005. pp. 47-57.

²⁵ National Security Strategy 15

²⁶ National Security Strategy 15

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.²⁷

Keeping freedom of action open, the document further suggests that "The United States will not use force in all cases to pre-empt emerging threats, nor should nations use pre-emption as a pretext for aggression. Yet in an age where the enemies of civilisation openly and actively seek the world's most destructive technologies, the United States cannot remain idle while dangers gather."²⁸ Hence the potential remains for the United States to act unilaterally in preventive war mode, and without sanction from the United Nations or any other organisation.

The enlargement of the global economy is also a key part of a national security strategy in this document, much more so than in previous security statements. While earlier documents in the Clinton years had added concerns with instabilities and environmental matters, the Bush doctrine is determined to reorganise the world with free markets and free trade. The acknowledgement that "all states are responsible for creating their own economic policies" is nearly completely swamped in the effusive endorsement of "economic freedom".²⁹ This is the other half of the logic for invading Iraq. The assumption here is that removing dictators will immediately result in the emergence of an American style capitalist economy by people who have simply been waiting for the opportunity which the marines have finally provided. In combination the assumption was apparently that invading Iraq would set off a demonstration effect in the region. That it has failed in this task in the region is one key argument against the Bush doctrine by its numerous critics.³⁰

Interestingly too the NSS includes a claim that the United States seeks to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and support environmental innovations broadly consistent with the Kyoto protocol even if the agreement itself is not specified. Likewise institutions of democracy are to be supported and built and economic growth supported by trade policy

²⁷ [National Security Strategy](#) 15

²⁸ [National Security Strategy](#) 15

²⁹ [National Security Strategy](#) 17

³⁰ Naomi Klein "Baghdad Year Zero: Pillaging Iraq in Pursuit of a Neocon Utopia" [Harpers](#) September 2004, 43-52. See also an especially trenchant critique of American imperial oil policy by Iraqi trade union leader Hassan Juma'a Awad in "Leave Our Country Now" [The Guardian](#) 18 February 2005 reprinted online by [Commondreams.org](#).

rather than aid. But China is chastised near the end for failing to follow its economic innovations by developing American style democracy. Its search for advanced weapons too is criticised as a threat to regional stability. International democracy does not however extend to the international criminal court which the NSS emphasises does not have jurisdiction over Americans. Finally the strategy addresses the need for innovations in the military and the importance of institutional innovations to adapt to the new global security situation that the United States faces.

At the heart of such claims is a simple assumption that the United States is a different place, a unique state with its role in history as the overarching guarantor of the future. Although whether this is as the purveyor of globalisation and interconnection in the form of a global economy that will end war by offering freedom to all, or the bringer of prophesied end times in some of the pre-millennialist interpretations of American fundamentalism, depends very much on specific interpretations of the overarching purpose of American power.³¹ In these formations, contrary to assumptions in much American international relations scholarship, American is not a normal state, or a state like any other. It is not just a great power, or a temporary hegemon. Instead it has a unique role to play in bending the world to its rule, for its own good supposedly. In short it is a formation with an explicit imperial mandate, however much such terminology may upset those who insist that they act on behalf of humanity as a whole. But of course this too is usually what empires claim to be doing as they bring violence to the “dangerous” peripheries in their systems.³²

CALLING 911: THE BUSH DOCTRINE

It is important to read this sequence of documents, from the defence guidance documents through PNAC and on to the National Security Strategy of 2002, as having considerable continuity. Then it is easy to understand that 9-11 gave the neo-cons the pretext on which to make their strategy of military primacy the operational code for the American state.³³ The focus on Afghanistan and war as a response to 9-11 also follows because there was no conceptualisation of terrorist organisations as separate from states. Neither was there any

³¹ See Michael Northcott *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* London: I.B. Tauris 2004.

³² See Derek Gregory *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine* Oxford: Blackwell 2004.

³³ Kenneth Waltz "The Continuity of International Politics" in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne eds. *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order* New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2002, 348-353.

realisation in the documents that the actions of America might cause intense opposition in many places, especially in the Middle East. The ethnocentrism and the focus on states perpetuates a much earlier understanding of international politics that, for all the talk of globalization in the 1990s, persisted in the halls of power, and was the discursive repertoire available on September 11th.

War provided legitimacy to George W. Bush as president which his contested election in 2000 had not. The invocation of the term global as the premise for the war on terror immediately confused matters in terms of the specific geographies of danger, but made sense in the terms of the PNAC formulation of America as the pre-eminent global power. The immediate emphasis on such things as National Missile Defense in the aftermath of 911, where had a system been operational it would have been quite as useless as any of the other weapons in the American military arsenal, makes sense once the overall view in the earlier documents is understood as the operational premise for decision making. The immediate hurry to invade Iraq, despite the absence of evidence of a connection with the 911 attacks, also suggests that this larger geopolitical framework was operational. But, that said, it is important to emphasise that while a general consensus on the geopolitics is clear, the specifics are highly contested. Not least the difficulties that result over what to do with American policy with Saudi Arabia, where the house of Saud is seen by many neo-conservatives as a dangerous and unstable regime that has funded all sorts of terrorist organizations indirectly for decades.³⁴

All this is linked to the heart of the Bush doctrine specification of the world, the assumption that America was attacked on September 11th simply because terrorists hate freedom or the American people. If one understands that the actions on September 11th might have been a strategic action designed to have effect on American foreign policy, and that the attacks on the United States are related to American foreign policy in the Middle East, rather than an existential challenge to America, then matters take on a very different appearance.³⁵ Viewed in these terms Osama Bin Laden's formulations of the need for struggle against foreign troops and the comprador elites of the Arabian Peninsula follows a fairly simple logic of national liberation, a removal of the infidel troops from the land of the two Holy Places.³⁶

³⁴ Victor Davis Hanson "Our Enemies: The Saudis" *Commentary* July 2002.

³⁵ See Simon Dalby "Calling 911: Geopolitics, Security and America's New War" *Geopolitics* 8(3). 2003. pp. 61-86.

³⁶ Osama Bin Laden "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places (Expel the Infidels from the Arab Peninsula)" August 23, 1996. (www.terrorismfiles.org/individuals/declaration_of_jihad1.html). This theme was repeated in his call to Westerners immediately prior to the November 2004 American election.

He uses numerous phrases to explain his antipathy to America, but it is all within a simple geography - a geography that is ignored in most of the discussions of the "global war on terror". Indeed it is ignored precisely because of the specification of that war as global. It was assumed in the propaganda of the Bush administration in the aftermath of 911 that this was a global war, allowing for actions all over the globe. The Pentagon's cartographers have responded by redrawing the combatant commands to encompass the entire planet, including Antarctica.³⁷ The most obvious feature of the Bush doctrine is precisely the assumption implicit in its pages that America can and does operate on a global scale.

If indeed the enemy is specified as attacking America because of what it is, rather than what it does, then the logic of this makes some sense. However if Bin Laden's declaration of war text is taken seriously, and his strategic aims examined carefully, this makes much less sense. Bin Laden's aims are clearly the removal of the corrupt elite of the House of Saud, and the infidels that support that regime and profit from its huge arms purchases, from the Arabian Peninsula. Read thus, attention is then directed at the regime in Riyadh, one that many of the neo-conservatives also despise because of its appalling record on human rights abuses and its funding of fundamentalist organizations that have ironically been the breeding ground for recruits for Al Qaeda. How one specifies the geography of the contemporary strategic situation is crucial.

There is more to Bin Laden's reasoning and his dislike for infidel civilisation, but the theme of that dislike being explicitly linked to the actions of that civilisation in the Middle East are key to Al Qaeda's struggle, and its appeal to Muslim youth. Getting this geography right suggests that the war on terror is one directly related to matters in the Middle East and the extraordinarily distorted societies based on huge oil wealth, a social order kept in place by American support, both directly in terms of security guarantees and a military presence, and indirectly in terms of business links, arms trading and training of security services of the elites in the Gulf and elsewhere.³⁸ But, and this is the key point, this is not the kind of analysis that is possible within the geopolitical categories used in the Bush doctrine during the first few years of the GWOT, with its focus on America and its specification of the world as in need of American leadership.

In the third administration some of this is beginning to change and the strategic specifications of danger are becoming more precise. George Bush's speech to the National

³⁷ W.S. Johnson, "New Challenges for the Unified Command Plan" *Joint Forces Quarterly* Summer 2002, pp. 62-70.

³⁸ See Michael Klare *Blood and Oil: The Dangers and Consequences of America's Growing Dependence on Imported Petroleum* New York: Metropolitan, 2004.

Endowment for Democracy in October 2005 focused much more explicitly on Islamic terrorists as a global threat, with an attempt to suggest a much more specific geography of danger, not least in the terms of Bin Laden and friends gaining control of Iraq should American forces withdraw.³⁹ The innovations in Condoleezza Rice's Middle East policy in 2005, and the explicit recognition that supporting authoritarian regimes at the expense of democracy there, suggests that some of these issues are at least being finessed in the third Bush administration. But on the other hand the blanket assertions of the desire to forcibly, if necessary, extend the remit of democracy in areas where regimes are reluctant to do so, also suggests a global ideological struggle rather than a more nuanced grand strategy that links ends and means in particular places.

IMPERIAL GEOPOLITICS

What is especially clear in the discussion of GWOT is the refusal to accept that deterrence is any longer an appropriate logic for an American defence strategy. The reasoning is very simple; terrorists will not be deterred by American military force; they were not on September 11th 2001. Therefore taking the offensive and taking the war to them is the only possible strategy that makes sense; an argument repeated endlessly by George W. Bush in the presidential campaign in 2004. When linked to a doctrine of rogue states, and the supposition in strategic thinking that these states might supply weapons of mass destruction to terrorist networks, the notion of pre-emption then takes on a further important dimension. It implies the right of Americans to decide where and when to attack potentially dangerous powers. But whether a military response to terrorism is the most appropriate way to act is sidestepped in the doctrine with focuses on states and their leaderships rather than any other political entities.

The doctrine of pre-emption also runs into not inconsiderable obstacles given the difficulties of intelligence and prediction of what is deliberately concealed. In the period of the first Bush presidency American intelligence first failed to predict the attacks of September 11th and then incorrectly asserted that the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq actually had weapons of mass destruction. Both times American intelligence was wrong; no wonder critics get so incensed when American politicians ignore international organisations and their

³⁹ "President Discusses War on Terror at National Endowment for Democracy", 6 October, 2005. (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/10/20051006-3.html>)

attempts to find non-violent negotiated arrangements to security problems. The difficulty with pre-emption is made doubly awkward by the simple fact that the United Nations inspectors got it right with Iraq. American intelligence got it wrong. A policy based on such intelligence is obviously one that is likely to be suspect in the eyes of potential friends not to mention adversaries identified and targeted by such 'intelligence'.

But the strategy of pre-emption and the clear declaration that no other state will be allowed to emerge as a military rival suggests much more than ordinary international politics and the use of war as a strategy of statecraft. Such pre-eminence suggests to many people outside the United States, and many critics within, an imperial ambition. The arrogation of the right to decide on matters of international politics in the face of hostility from international organizations was roundly condemned in the lead up to the invasion of Iraq. The rhetoric in the 2005 State of the Union speech singling out Syria and Iran as potential targets, while notably ignoring North Korea, which really does have weapons of mass destruction and the ability to deliver them at least against Japanese targets, suggests a list of states that are to be brought into line with American policies in a way analogous with the Iraqi action.

While the temptation for further action in the Middle East may be considerable through the third Bush administration, there is a contradiction at the heart of the American efforts related to the innovations in the military capabilities trumpeted in the so-called 'revolution in military affairs' - the persistent argument in the American military that it is not in the nation-building business, and George W. Bush's statement in the 2003 State of the Union address that America "exercises power without conquest". The rapid increase in high technology weaponry and its undoubted superiority on the battlefield is not however related to having a large number of soldiers available for garrison and pacification duties. America does not do nation building; it is not an empire after all, because they apparently do conquer territory. What it can do, and has recently demonstrated in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq, is willing to do, is to destroy regimes and the infrastructure that keep them in place. But the subsequent reconstruction and institutional rearrangements will be left to commercial enterprises and the troops of willing allies; its not the task of the U.S. military.

The relatively small size of the American forces, with less than two million, or one percent of the American population in uniform, has the advantage of reducing the casualty figures and keeps the professional salaries manageable in a budget that is still a relatively small percentage of GDP. But it does mean that troops in large numbers are not available to guard crucial facilities and do nation building after a war to accomplish regime change, before it has finished its major combat phase. While the parallels with the British imperial

hegemony of the nineteenth century are instructive, not least in how the British ran India with a relatively tiny bureaucracy, the small number of combat troops and limited availability of smart munitions does constrain what can be done using military means directly. In short, the constabulary function in the wild zones of political crisis which the PNAC suggested as one of the key functions of the American military, is one that the present military is not well equipped or adequately staffed to perform.

Hence the internal contradiction at the heart of the Bush doctrine - its ambitions to global security are limited by the “constabulary” capabilities of its military and the inadequacies of its development and institution-building capabilities.⁴⁰ Its global reach may destroy governments that it deems threatening, but it has great difficulty reconstructing the states after they are attacked. Pre-emption and the consequent denial of international law undermine support for American policies and hence exacerbate the difficulties of finding allied troops to do nation building. Thus instability requires continued military monitoring, an “empire of disorder” in Alain Joxe’s telling phrase.⁴¹ The larger lessons of empire - that sound and competent administration of remote parts of the empire is the best assurance of stability - seems lost in a series of geopolitical and strategic formulations that cannot specify the world in a way that deals with the specific messy political realities of the Gulf and elsewhere. Above all else, by using a geopolitical logic that insists on American prerogatives to decide on acceptable and unacceptable political practices abroad, while simultaneously downplaying prior economic and political connections across those geopolitical boundaries in favour of short term military considerations, long-term security for most of the planet’s peoples continues to be compromised.

⁴⁰ Many arguments on these lines have appeared in print but see in particular Wesley K. Clark Winning Modern Wars: Iraq, Terrorism, and the American Empire New York: Public Affairs, 2003, and Thomas P.M. Barnett The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century New York: Putnam's 2004.

⁴¹ Alain Joxe Empire of Disorder New York: Semiotexte 2002.

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