Continuity and Change in U.S. National Security Policy

Michael E. Brown

Introduction

The organizers of the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS) have chosen an exceptionally important theme for the 2005 International Symposium on Security Affairs: the security policy of the United States during the second term of President George W. Bush, and the implications of U.S. policy for international and Asian security. Indeed, it is difficult to think of an issue that will have more widespread implications for international security over the rest of the decade. In addition to having the world's largest economy, the United States has unprecedented military power. The United States spends more on defense and military capabilities than all of the world's other major powers combined—and most of these powers are U.S. allies. The United States consequently has global power-projection capabilities that no other state can match. One scholar has observed that the United States now has an unprecedented "command of the commons"—command of the sea, space, and air—that is likely to continue for years to come.[1] The direction and conduct of U.S. national security policy will therefore have profound international implications.

This paper will examine the prospects for continuity and change in the Bush administration's national security policy, as well as areas where modifications in U.S. national security policy are needed.

Continuity is Likely

U.S. national security policy will probably exhibit much more continuity than change during the second term of the presidency of George W. Bush. There are four main reasons for this.

First, contrary to what many have argued, President Bush himself appears to be his administration's principal policy maker, and Bush is, by all counts, an exceptionally resolute individual.[2] Although an examination of the religious and personal roots of Bush's self-

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1 See Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Summer 2003).

2 For a scholarly analysis of the role of George W. Bush in the making of U.S. national security policy, see Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003). For a journalistic account, see Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt," *New York Times Magazine*, October 17, 2004.

confidence and determination is far beyond the scope of this paper, it seems clear that the President's commitment to "stay the course" on national security issues is also based on a set of strategic convictions about the best way to reassure allies and deter adversaries. As Bush stated during the 2004 presidential campaign, "By remaining resolute and firm and strong, the world will be peaceful."[3] One sign of President's Bush's commitment to continuity is his well-known unwillingness to acknowledge policy mistakes. As Bush once stated, "I have not looked back on one decision I have made and wished I had made it a different way."[4] If one does not acknowledge that current policies are less than perfect, then policy changes are unlikely. The President believes that his national security policies are moving in the right direction, that policy changes are not needed, and that policy continuity is, in any event, a great virtue.

Second, President Bush's top security policy advisors from the first term will stay in the administration at least for the first part of the second term, and the personnel changes that are taking place will make this group more like-minded and close-knit than ever. Vice President Richard Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld are still in place. Condoleezza Rice, the President's closest foreign policy advisor, is moving from her White House post as National Security Advisor to become the new Secretary of State. Colin Powell, generally seen as the senior administration official most likely to offer dissenting views on national security issues such as the use of military force, is being replaced by the President's most trusted confidant. Rice, in turn, is being replaced by Stephen Hadley, who served in the first term as Deputy National Security Advisor. It is expected that he will be another source of policy continuity. George Tenet, who was appointed as Director of Central Intelligence by President Clinton, has been replaced by Peter Goss, a Republican loyalist. This team is not likely to advocate major departures in U.S. national security policy. To the contrary, these key advisors—Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, in particular—are deeply committed to the policies that they helped to develop during the President's first term.

Third, the U.S. national security agenda will continue to be dominated by the ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Neither country is likely to be fully stabilized in the next year or two. As a result, both the President and his top advisors will continue to be preoccupied by these crises. This, in turn, will cut into the amount of time and energy they will be able to devote to other foreign and security policy issues or to new policy initiatives. At the same time, U.S. military forces will continue to be burdened by the ongoing operations in

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[3] Quoted in Suskind, "Without a Doubt."
[4] Quoted in Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*.

Iraq and Afghanistan. Recent reports suggest that U.S. active and reserve forces are already stretched to the breaking point.[5] Some U.S. military personnel are being prevented from retiring on schedule due to pressing needs to maintain troop levels. The strains caused by the war in Iraq, in particular, will limit the Bush administration's ability to launch large-scale military actions elsewhere. Given the President's opposition to conscription—a non-voluntary draft of civilians into the military—the personnel pressures generated by the Iraq and Afghanistan operations could lead the Bush administration to redeploy U.S. forces from peacetime positions in Asia and Europe. This is one area where a continued commitment to ongoing operations could lead to some practical changes in U.S. military policy.

Fourth and last, U.S. national security policy will probably exhibit a great deal of continuity during President Bush's second term because both Bush and his senior advisors have a deep and abiding commitment to two established strategic objectives: winning the war on terrorism and promoting democracy in the Middle East and elsewhere. According to the President's *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*:

> "Defending our Nation against its enemies is the first and fundamental commitment of the Federal Government. Today, that task has changed dramatically.... Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and turn the power of modern technologies against us. To defeat this threat we must make use of every tool in our arsenal—military power, better homeland defenses, law enforcement, intelligence, and vigorous efforts to cut off terrorist financing. The war against terrorists of global reach is a global enterprise of uncertain duration."[6]

There is no doubt that the war against terrorism will remain the Bush administration's top national security priority. The administration believes that promoting the development of democratic institutions in the Middle East and the broader Muslim world is one of the main pillars of the long-term campaign to combat terrorism. As the President explained, "The United States has undertaken a great calling of history to aid the forces of reform and freedom in the broader Middle East so that region can grow in hope, instead of growing in anger."[7] In short, the strategic objectives and security policy priorities of the Bush administration are fixed — unless unforeseen events intervene.

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[5] See Bradley Graham, "General Says Army Reserve Is Becoming a 'Broken' Force," *Washington Post*, January 6, 2005.

[6] *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002.

[7] President's Remarks, "President Nominates Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State," Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, November 16, 2004.

Surprise is Possible

As an American observer famously noted, "It is hard to make predictions—especially about the future." Social scientists, policy analysts, and policy makers often fall into the trap of assuming that the future will be an extension of the present and that future developments will unfold in a simple, linear manner. However, as we have seen in our own lifetimes, the world can change suddenly and radically. In January 1989, no one predicted that within four years, the Berlin Wall would fall, Germany would be unified, the Soviet Union would cease to exist, and that people in Europe would be the victims of genocide. In January 2001, when President Bush first came to office, no one predicted that within four years the United States would be shaken by terrorist attacks and that the United States and its allies would subsequently invade Afghanistan and Iraq. Although continuity is often likely, surprise is always possible, and major surprises could transform the strategic landscape in ways that we cannot anticipate. This, in turn, could create new strategic priorities and re-oriented national security policies.

Although potential surprises are many and varied—they could unfold in any part of the world or in any issue area—four possibilities merit special attention.[8]

First, terrorists could launch another major attack against the United States or a major ally. In worst-case scenarios, an attack could involve chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons.[9] Terrorists could combine a physical attack with a cyber attack on government response and emergency services systems, or they could utilize computer networks to attack critical infrastructures such as telecommunications, transportation, banking, electrical grids, oil and gas distribution systems, water supply systems, and other government services. Cyber attacks on these infrastructures have already become common, and deadly attacks on increasingly vulnerable systems could be launched in the future.[10] It would be a mistake to assume that future terrorist attacks will resemble those of the past.

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[8] For more discussion, see "Strategic Surprises for a New Administration," *Schlesinger Working Group Report*, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Fall 2004; Michael E. Brown, ed., *Grave New World: Security Challenges in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003); Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Coté, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *New Global Dangers: Changing Dimensions of International Security* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004).

[9] To assess the preparedness of the United States and its European allies to deal with the effects of a bio-terrorism attack, the Center for Transatlantic Relations at Johns Hopkins University in conjunction with the University of Pittsburgh conducted a major policy simulation, *Atlantic Storm*, on January 14, 2005. They discovered that Western governments are not well-prepared to deal with such an attack.

[10] For more discussion of cyber-terrorism, see Dorothy E. Denning, "Information Technology and Security," in Brown, ed., *Grave New World*.

Second, the United States and its allies could suffer major setbacks in Iraq or Afghanistan. Although both countries could stabilize militarily, politically, and economically, sharp turns for the worse are possible. The security situations in both countries are volatile. A multi-faceted insurgency comprised primarily of Baathist loyalists, Sunni activists, disgruntled nationalists, and transnational jihadists continues to rage in Iraq. Most of Afghanistan is controlled by local warlords, not the central government or Western troops. Friendly leaders in both countries are targets for assassination. A major setback in either country could force the United States and its allies to choose between an expanded military presence or a withdrawal. Either course would entail strategic risks and high costs.

Third, strategic surprises could take the form of regional developments: the collapse of friendly governments in countries such as Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, political change in adversaries such as Iran or North Korea, instability in major powers such as Russia or China, regional conflict in South Asia, or, on a more positive note, progress in Israeli-Palestinian relations. Although political leaders come and go in some country in some part of the world almost every week, an unexpected change in a key regional power could radically alter the strategic equation. Unfortunately, given that the United States will continue to be preoccupied with the war on terrorism and the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it will be hard for the Bush administration to give many regional developments the full attention they deserve. Some regional issues will inevitably be neglected, some regional opportunities will be missed, and many regional problems will go unsolved.

Fourth and last, strategic surprises could unfold in functional issue areas, such as the international energy or financial markets. For example, key components of the energy infrastructure—pipelines, terminals, power plants, and transmission grids—are increasingly vulnerable to attack.[11] A major disruption in either the energy or financial markets would have tremendous implications for the United States and its ability to afford its current national security policies. Defense spending in the United States is projected to increase dramatically over the course of the decade—from $397 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 to $470 billion in FY2007—and that does not take the cost of the Iraq war into account. Economic problems will have important national security implications.

These and other unforeseen developments could obligate the United States and its allies to re-calibrate national security priorities and move in new policy directions. Unfortunately, the Bush administration has charted a course that severely limits America's

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[11] For more discussion of energy issues, see Martha Harris, "Energy and Security," in Brown, ed., *Grave New World*.

capacity to deal with surprises. The U.S. federal budget, the U.S. defense budget, and U.S. military forces are already stretched, which means that any major unpleasant surprise could generate a policy crisis. The United States does not have much slack capacity, and it consequently does not have much policy flexibility.

Change is Needed

In the longer term, the United States needs to develop a more multi-faceted and ambitious national security policy—a truly grand strategy for the promotion of national and international security.

To fight the war on terrorism more effectively, the United States needs to place less emphasis on military actions and more emphasis on economic and political programs that will weaken the appeal of terrorist ideologies and organizations. One terrorism expert argues that the United States and other Western powers need to develop a two-track strategy for preventing and countering terrorism: "a set of short-term actions that address immediate threats and challenges; and a set of longer-term actions that will shape the environments that enable terrorist networks to develop. The latter must focus on those places globalization has left behind."[12] This will entail devising a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development in the developing world—a vision that includes economic growth, good governance, education, and the provision of basic needs such as health care. The most effective policy instruments in this long-term campaign will be non-military instruments.[13]

To promote democracy more effectively, the United States needs to place less emphasis on rushed elections and more emphasis on the long-term efforts that are needed to nurture viable democracies. The United States—along with its Western allies and the United Nations—are often tempted to sponsor elections in conflict settings at the earliest possible juncture. The rationale is that local actors need to be given a voice in governance, but the reality is that intervening powers like to have tangible signs of policy progress. Although elections can be held under unstable conditions, true democracies require stable state structures, respect for the rule of law, strong political institutions, and robust civil societies. The goal should be the development of durable democracies, and this is a long-term process that cannot be rushed.[14]

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[12] Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Transnational Terrorism and Security," in Brown, ed., *Grave New World.*
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] See Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000).

Finally, the United States needs to recognize that its extraordinarily powerful position in world affairs presents both dangers and opportunities. If the United States comes to be seen by others as a loose cannon—a powerful state guided by unilateralism—then other powers will be more likely to band together against it.[15] This would have adverse consequences for one and all. To advance its own national interests more effectively and to promote a more benign world order, the U.S. leaders should follow four guidelines for constructive strategic engagement.[16]

First, U.S. leaders must recognize that many security problems in the 21st century will be transnational and international phenomena. They will cross national borders and cut across regions. Some will be truly global in scope. It will be beyond the capability of any one actor—even a superpower such as the United States—to tackle these problems on its own. National leaders who try to tackle these problems unilaterally will fail; national interests will correspondingly suffer. Therefore, one of the most basic principles of security policy in the 21st century will be multilateralism: Transnational and international security problems will require multilateral policy responses. Multilateralism will not be an option—it will be a necessity.

Second, those who seek to forge multilateral initiatives must remember that multilateralism cannot be turned on and off and on again. Building multilateral patterns of cooperation takes steady, sustained engagement. The United States, which often suffers from international attention deficit syndrome, will have to pay continuous attention to the maintenance of multiple international coalitions. In addition, multilateralism is not an à la carte proposition. The United States cannot champion multilateralism when it is convenient for Washington to do so, and slight it the rest of the time. The United States must be prepared to engage on issues across the board.[17]

Third, for multilateralism to endure, it needs a strong institutional foundation—the United Nations. It is certainly true that the United Nations has many structural and political flaws, and that it frequently exasperates even its staunchest supporters. It is also true that the United Nations has a unique and important role to play in promoting international peace and security. In the 21st century, international actors will have to take coordinated steps to address common threats, and the United Nations provides an indispensable mechanism for facilitating multilateral actions. The United States and the other leading powers in the international

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[15] Some scholars believe this is already happening. See the debate in *International Security*, Summer 2005.

[16] These guidelines are drawn from Michael E. Brown, "Security Problems and Security Policy in a Grave New World," in Brown, ed., *Grave New World*.

[17] These guidelines come from Chantal de Jonge Oudraat.

system would be wise to put the diplomatic trauma of the Iraq crisis behind them and work to develop the United Nations into a more effective instrument for the promotion of international peace and security. Building a strong, effective, and respected United Nations is in the enlightened self-interest of the world's leading powers—the United States, in particular.

Fourth and last, multilateral initiatives will require leadership. Although the United States will not be able to lead on every issue at every juncture, it will continue to be the world's one and only superpower for the foreseeable future. American leadership—in identifying problems, devising strategies, forging coalitions, providing resources, and taking actions—will therefore be key. If American political leaders play a more energetic and effective global leadership role, many national, regional, and international security challenges will become more manageable. If American leaders are unwilling, disinclined, or unable to play this role, a wide array of security problems will become increasingly formidable.

An immediate challenge for the Bush administration will be undoing the diplomatic damage caused by its handling of the Iraq war. Although U.S. actions in Iraq had the active support of some governments and the tacit support of others, large numbers of people around the world were shocked and appalled by what they saw as unconstrained American unilateralism. Addressing these concerns and overcoming these impressions will require sustained American diplomacy.

More generally, American officials need to develop a better appreciation of what effective international leadership entails. Since the end of the Cold War and cutting across both Democratic and Republican administrations, the prevailing American approach to international problems has been to set a U.S. course and assume that others will ultimately follow—willingly or grudgingly. Complaints about American presumptuousness and arrogance have consequently become increasingly common. American officials would be wise to appreciate that true leadership is based on true consultation. It is not enough for Washington to inform others of what it intends to do. The United States needs to consult with allies, friends, and others about goals, strategies, and actions. Above all, Washington needs to make a genuine effort to take the views of others into account. The United States clearly has the capacity to undertake unilateral actions in the international arena, but it will be able to lead only if listens.