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AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM AND A NEW WORLD ORDER

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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U.S. Army War College
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ABSTRACT

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The United States has a long tradition of placing American values at the center of foreign policy. Establishing a new world order that is based on three cornerstones will begin to shape a new leadership role for the U.S. This involves a shift to soft power as the core competency of foreign policy. In addition, the U.S. needs to lead in developing key innovations and developing a global economic strategy. Also, the U.S. needs to maintain military might unequalled in the world. Achieving this new strategy rests upon international organizational change with the U.S. leading the way for a new world order.

AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM AND A NEW WORLD ORDER

The history of American Exceptionalism can be traced to a young French visitor to the United States, Alexis de Tocqueville, who spent the years of 1831 and 1832 traveling around the country¹. When he returned to France, Tocqueville wrote a book titled *Democracy in America*. His basic premise is that the American people are different from Europeans. As a country, we have notable differences from other developed nations, including our unique history, the constitution, historical evolution, and distinctive political and religious institutions that set the U.S. apart from the rest of the world. American Exceptionalism stems from Puritan Roots that began as early as 1630 when Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor John Winthrop uttered the words a “city upon a hill”².

The Puritans believed that God had chosen them to lead other nations of the earth and this city was a model city for all to emulate. Reality did not quite measure up to expectations; this “city upon a hill” was responsible for the massacre of Pequot Indians. This notion that God had chosen them enabled them to massacre in the “name of God”. This is an early indication of what is often termed “manifest destiny”. The actual words “manifest destiny” was first uttered by the editor and writer John O’Sullivan on the eve of the war with Mexico in the middle of the 19th century, just after the United States annexed Texas. O’Sullivan stated it was “the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions”³. O’Sullivan felt we were destined to be the great nation of the future and in ways we are a great nation, though in other ways we have failed.

The American Exceptionalism idea was again verbalized during the invasion of the Philippines when President William McKinley exclaimed that God told him to take the Philippines. Then Secretary of War, Eliah Root, declared, "The American soldier is different from all other soldiers of all other countries since the world began. He is the advance guard of liberty and justice, of law and order, and of peace and happiness"⁴. In reality, American action in the Philippines, would take the lives of 600,000 Filipinos⁵. This fact is often overlooked or glazed over quickly. We basically believe that America was the good guy; not that this action came with a considerable cost to the Filipinos. America has always laid claim that we are different because our military actions are for the benefit of not only America, but for the benefit of others. A current example is the "global war on terrorism". America is becoming and increasingly being perceived as the savior of the world. Our very existence in Europe, during the Cold War, was to prevent the Soviet Union from aggressive action. Since the demise of the Cold War, we now utilize the war on terrorism for justification of military action. We have been involved in military missions, on land other than our own, throughout our history; though we have a history of so-called isolationism through out the 19th century.

Since the Vietnam War, the American military has done pretty much what we wanted to in the Gulf War, Panama, Haiti, Grenada, Serbia, and now Afghanistan and Iraq, with far less loss of life than the enemy, when faced with conventional warfare. The loss of life in Iraq was not due to direct enemy fire or conventional warfare. It is the very fact that the U.S. military is so strong that prevented the Iraq insurgency from fighting a conventional fight. We currently enjoy a combat imbalance with every nation in the world. There is no other military that is close to exhibiting the combat power

possessed by the U.S. military. We currently have troops stationed in well over 100 nations including, Europe, Korea, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The United States often acts to settle perceived problems of the world, and largely, we answer that call as evidenced by the number of troops deployed worldwide. Without the U.S. military being such a strong force, American Exceptionalism would not be as pervasive. We are exceptional because we can and do deploy our military world wide. However, it is worth remembering that every country is unique or exceptional to some degree⁶.

Many times, U.S. military action is disguised under the cloak of NATO involvement but we reserve the right to act independently. It was Bill Clinton's Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, who said at one point, "If possible we will act in the world multilaterally, but if necessary, we will act unilaterally"⁷. This is exactly what the U.S. did in regard to Iraq. Because the U.S. is uniquely responsible for the world, concerning democracy and peace, we can act in a singular fashion, if necessary, for the good of the world. We can do this because we have chosen to be the exception and not the rule. Because the U.S. considers itself uniquely responsible for the world, the U.S. also considers itself exempt from legal and moral standards accepted by other nations in the world. "There is a long list of such self-exemptions: the refusal to sign the Kyoto Treaty regulating the pollution of the environment, the refusal to strengthen the convention on biological weapons. The United States has failed to join the hundred-plus nations that have agreed to ban land mines, in spite of the appalling statistics about amputations performed on children mutilated by those mines. The U.S. refuses to ban the use of napalm and cluster bombs. We insist that we must not be subject, as are other countries, to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court"⁸.

American Exceptionalism exists on selective memory⁹. It is now time to really look at whether or not we are indeed exceptional and begin to re-frame our place in the world. The U.S. has a long tradition of placing American values at the center of foreign policy; often termed “Wilsonian” since this belief argues that America has a crusading duty to use its power to disseminate the American values abroad¹⁰. This became a cornerstone for the Bush administration after the 9/11 attacks. A surge of patriotism and the revival of values as a theme prompted an aggressively unilateralist foreign policy¹¹. This policy has not served the U.S. well. A multilateral approach based on partnerships that promote democracy and global security will foster a new world order. The lack of progress in Iraq and difficulties in Afghanistan have discredited the notion that America is exceptional, and tarnished the American reputation for high moral character¹². It may be time to step back and re-think how exceptional we may or may not be. There may just be a different way, other than the American way, to accomplish peace and good will. Now is the time to invest in listening skills and diplomacy.

The United States can no longer ignore an increasingly networked and interdependent world. This new world order requires the U.S. to address foreign policy in a new manner. There is now a global standard that the U.S. must learn to address in order to become an exceptional world leader. This requires the U.S. to become a central partner instead of insisting the U.S. way is the only way. There are several central actions necessary for the U.S. in this new world environment. A shift to soft power as a core competency of foreign policy is essential. This requires a re-thinking of what the expected outcomes of foreign policy should be. A nation only appears free to choose its own destiny, as long as that destiny is according to American values, and

the American idea of democracy. A shift to understanding that there are other means of governance that are not evil, would allow the U.S. to provide world leadership without alienating countries that are not built on American values and democracy. The U.S. stance should be centered on the right of an individual to take part in the government of one's country as a universal human right. The U.S. needs to become a global leader in negotiating arrangements that further peace and economic development. A continued strong message based on universal human rights instead of American values will ultimately achieve greater unity among global partners and greater unity with our foes. America must be extraordinary in providing leadership to the world without arrogance.

Instead of waiting until military action appears to be imminent and the only solution, the U.S. needs to engage in the art of diplomacy. This means opening the diplomatic channels to all countries, especially Cuba. Too often the U.S. has a tendency to ignore issues, instead of addressing issues, probably because we are not a patient nation and want action immediately. This is not how diplomacy works.

Diplomacy is a long, drawn out process that takes years and maybe centuries, with often little apparent movement, but with repeatedly lasting results. An example of diplomacy and economics at work is the European Union. In the last 20 years, the EU, which once was a loose free market, is now becoming a unique collective power. This is a collective power that once was very dependent on U.S. protection¹³. This dependency on U.S. protection no longer exists. While the EU's method of operation, (sharing power, hammering out agreements, resolving conflict by endless committee) can be boring and even frustrating to watch and does not sit well with our culture, it

does appear to be working¹⁴. The EU may become the power of tomorrow, and could wind up being equal in might to the US.

Statistics support this claim. In 2009, Europe will surpass the U.S. in wealth, according to the Boston Consulting Group. By the following year, the European population will hit half a billion and European GDP will nearly match that of the U.S. and China combined¹⁵. Nearly a half-dozen countries are now seeking EU membership in order to gain economic shelter from the current economic crisis and to reap the benefits of the EU association. The crisis itself appears to have unexpectedly strengthened the continent's cohesion, along with the recently ratified Lisbon Treaty. This Treaty streamlines the way Europe runs its affairs¹⁶. Ratifying the Lisbon Treaty was not an easy feat, and was a result of a significant diplomatic effort. The EU also has 71,000 troops stationed outside its territory, a global footprint second only to America¹⁷. Europe still remains divided in many areas but it does appear that the EU is making progress. Slow, steady progress is bringing success to the EU. The U.S. diplomatic efforts would also be slow and steady, but could also bring global success in the form of prosperity and peace.

There may be other lessons to learn from the EU. Over the past decade, EU members have begun to lead and organize their own peacekeeping missions in places like Bosnia, Congo, Georgia, and Chad. Most of them are independent of the U.S., though in most cases they are supported by NATO. According to a 2008 RAND Corporation study, these EU led peacekeeping operations have a 33 percent higher success rate than efforts led by the U.S., based on whether the subject countries ended up peaceful and democratic¹⁸. That is not democratic according to U.S. standards but

democratic nonetheless, where the individual has a say in the governance of the nation. Other military successes by the EU include the current naval mission in the waters off Somalia. A flotilla of European warships has foiled some 100 pirate attacks since the start of the year¹⁹.

The 21 European states with soldiers in Afghanistan have suffered a third of the Coalition's 1,400 combat deaths. How and when the U.S. military might is put into play needs to be examined, and perhaps a new strategy adopted. The use of military power or hard power should be the second cornerstone of the U.S strategy for foreign policy. Hard power needs to continue to be a power the U.S. retains, and the U.S. Armed Forces need to remain the best in the world. A shift to diplomacy and a more European approach is not a shift away from U.S. military might and supremacy. However, the use of the military requires thoughtful consideration with a clear goal, end state, and with a multilateral approach. While a powerful military is necessary it should not be the first action. This often is the default for the US, since the use of the military is a core function of our nation. Establishing military action to further universal human rights would ensure consistency, and dispel hypocrisy in foreign policy. Of course responding to a threat to homeland security can always be met with military action. Our use of military power must be held to a standard that requires a great deal of discussion and forethought, with a clear understanding of goals and end state, prior to committing forces for far off military action.

The U.S. needs to lead in developing key innovations and developing a global economic strategy. Innovation and economic development is the third cornerstone of foreign policy. It will serve the U.S. well to collaborate with other nations to allow

decisions to be made by majority rather than U.S. decision only. The U.S. must be willing to recognize that others have a vote. Understanding core issues and the root of the problem and searching for economic solutions, will allow the U.S. to become a dynamic leader at the global level. It is important to proclaim a new order, where the U.S. is dedicated to working with partners and developing partners in peace. This change in verbiage will make it easier to form coalitions of the willing, while providing the capability for different countries to move at different speeds, and still contribute to world peace as a collective. Developing a strong economic base at home and abroad is a strategy currently in use by China, and it has achieved great success²⁰. The U.S. needs to focus on maintaining a strong economic base, by enhancing technological and financial superiority, and center on industrial and agricultural capabilities in developing and at risk countries.

A strengthened partnership and active engagement with NATO should increasingly become a foundation of policy. A look towards working with the UN, to increase funding for infrastructure and economic growth for countries at risk, is essential for long term global stability. The U.S. should no longer seek to implement restrictions based on a country's political stance. In order for soft power to become a central mission and core competency, equal to our military supremacy, the U.S. needs to increase the number of diplomats. The U.S. needs to become a leader in diplomacy or soft power; become a global economic leader and maintain its military supremacy.

It is important to protect free trade and universal rights, and no longer pursue the spreading of the American brand of democracy as a national core value. This means adopting a centralist position and letting go of the notion that we are exceptional;

accepting the fact that other possibilities exist. It does not mean accepting atrocities against humanity or relinquishing our right to engage in military action. It does mean understanding that a multilateral approach may be a better fit for today's new world. Societies not based on democracy would have open lines of communication with the US. Changing foreign policy to one that advocates finding the commonalities among us, and looks to diplomacy and global economic growth, along with military supremacy as core functions, will be a policy that reaps dividends over time; slow and fruitful dividends. Working to achieve a change in the world through communication and working together would be a good thing. As the saying goes, you can often get more accomplished with sugar than with vinegar.

So, what must be done to achieve this new strategy, and provide for a new world order with the U.S. leading in a diplomacy role? Settling on the specifics to institute a new world order is a difficult task. However, the only way to go about a new world order is for a power, like the U.S., to take the lead. It is also the likelihood that only the U.S. could take on such a task and succeed. Under George W. Bush, diplomacy and global institutional change was not a priority and suffered²¹. This reluctance for a gentler approach to leading seems to be turning with the election of President Barack Obama. It is now time for international change to take hold and for the U.S. to take advantage and use the international world to advance U.S. interests. International institutions can also benefit from a stronger relationship with the U.S. These institutions can channel the power of the United States and therefore enhance their own security and national interests²². The U.S. continues to be vulnerable to international threats, and a new international order will be essential in confronting these threats²³.

The new international order should include a robust framework of international institutions, which include both formal organizations and treaties, and informal rules and standards of legitimacy. This is necessary because institutions facilitate the United States' own global leadership. It is far easier to manage the world economy with an effective World Trade Organization than without one²⁴. Less obvious is how these organizations can advance the security interests of the U.S. Engaging in a "coalition of the willing" is an inefficient approach. Each new coalition requires a new set of bargaining power, rules, and patterns of cooperation. With an established institution, nations develop the habit of working together. An added benefit when nations work together is it makes it easier for the nations to achieve cooperation on related issues. An example is NATO's intelligence sharing network²⁵. This network was designed during the Cold War to gather information on the Soviet Union. When the need arose, the network was quickly adapted to deal with the global Islamist terrorism issue. However, you should not be misled to believe that institutions can solve all problems, it will not happen. However, institutions can share the burden of cooperation among nations. Instead of always asking the question, should we work together? The question would be, how should we work together? This burden of cooperation would cease to be a burden when it becomes the standard instead of the exception.

This interdependence among countries will serve to increase the benefits of the institution. Increasingly the list of global and domestic problems the U.S. will encounter can not be solved by the U.S. alone, but an international organization of interdependent nations can provide continuous attention to global problems and contribute to the resolution of domestic issues. In order to address global terrorism, establishing a

reliable and efficient set of controls to monitor borders would be helpful²⁶. This endeavor would work only through an international organization. Instead of one shot solutions an international organization can work together for long term solutions.

As the complexity of the world increases the need for information also increases. Although the U.S. is able to gather a great deal of information on its own, there is duplicate effort and wasted resources working alone. An international organization can become an organization of information sharing and would reduce the duplication of efforts among allies with the U.S. This world of sharing would also serve to add missing pieces to the information the U.S. collects alone providing a more complete picture of the global security issues of the world. This development of a standard for the collection of data is a lofty task but one that would hold great dividends for U.S. and world security.

Working with a global institution can also serve to reduce the need for active management of the international system, thereby reducing the perception that it is solely U.S. power that is being exercised²⁷. Right now, the U.S. government has an interest in Iran's nuclear program, as do U.S. allies. The International Atomic Energy Agency is charged with addressing this kind of problem. Without this organization, the U.S. would have to burn up additional resources and political capital to procure information about Iran's nuclear program and would most likely be less successful²⁸. It is pretty clear that with a greater network of global institutions that work to protect the U.S. interests, along with their own, the less the U.S. needs to employ power in ways that may provoke resentment among other governments. The benefits of working together in an international organization were largely lost on the Bush administration²⁹. The thought

during the last eight years was that working through these organizations would be inefficient. Of course, at times, this might be true, however, it would be more harmful to fail to recognize that leading powers benefit from working within international organizations and greater strength can be achieved through cooperation. For the U.S. to enjoy security and prosperity, it is necessary to reclaim the status as a reliable and visionary leader whom others wish to emulate ³⁰

Working through an organization has generally enabled leading states rather than constraining them³¹. There are many that tend to appreciate the use of military power but scoff at the importance of global institution or diplomatic power. Quite simply an equation that pits the U.S. against the world is a losing equation. It will be much harder for the U.S. to advance national interest without the cooperation of other like minded nations. The U.S. is at a pivotal moment that can be capitalized upon in order to lead reform and has the capabilities to overcome problems that may occur. Since the U.S. stands to lose the least, others nations are often pushed toward cooperation. It remains the case that the U.S. is the sole superpower in the world today. This alone can often sway other countries and can give the U.S. the legitimacy it needs to lead reform in institutional organizations. However, the U.S. can not ignore that other nations are on the rise. By sponsoring and leading global institutions the U.S. can transform an anarchic, conflict-prone world into an open, universal community under law, in which countries can pursue a common security³²

A shift from the U.S. being the sole superpower is a very long way off. As mentioned before the EU, at some point in the distant future, may become a real competitor. This shift in world power is very slow and nowhere on the horizon.

However, it does not mean that the U.S. needs to go it alone with global issues. It is necessary to look at trends and plan for the future. While the power of the U.S. military is often the measure for a superpower, another measure is economic power. Economic multipolarity is, or soon will be, the standard. When it comes to making, managing, and remaking international institutions, nation states remain the most important element. Currently, no other country can match the United States' combination of wealth, size, technological capacity, and productivity³³. The shift in the future will be that the U.S. will have to work with more countries than it does today but the future will continue to be that the U.S. is in a far stronger position to lead the world than any other nation.

Henry Kissinger has long indicated that the U.S. lacks legitimacy in the world arena³⁴. This would indicate that leadership is dependent upon world affairs and only obtained under certain conditions. Legitimate leadership is based on the idea that an action or a political order is acceptable or natural. For instance, the Vietnam War or the invasion of Iraq may come to be seen as illegitimate or legitimate. The U.S. is well posed to take on a legitimate leadership role. We continue to have a far larger share of the human and material resources for shaping global perceptions³⁵. We also have the capability to produce public goods that reinforce and benefit the role the U.S. plays in the global society. No other nation can compete with the U.S. on this level. This naturally gives the U.S. a power leadership position. There is no prospect of any counterbalancing organization. When all is said and done the U.S. is in the position to be the leader, whether other nations like it or not. However, great power often comes with overconfidence, and the U.S. has to be careful not to come across as arrogant in

our dealing with other nations. This creates a challenge the U.S. must address by consciously working to avoid this perception.

In order to work within the international system of institutions and institute change five basic elements need to be addressed³⁶. First, it is important to play up the benefits of the reform. Second, make sure the proposed framework provides public goods. Third, link the public goods to the current order. Fourth, remain consistent with past positions and lastly, persuade others that change is needed. Persuading other that change is needed may just be the most important. Without, others working towards the same goal, that goal will be, if not entirely, out of reach.

Institutional reforms are easier for the masses and more likely to be endorsed if the reform benefits all participants. The more nations that understand they will benefit from the reform the less likely the reform will receive push back. One example of using this method was the Proliferation Security Initiative. This initiative was sponsored by the U.S. and serves as a framework for interdicting weapons of mass destruction at sea, in the air, and on land. This initiative was designed to give the U.S. Navy more operational latitude but was billed as a “global effort” for world security. This initiative created new *de jure* rights for other parties, even though *de facto* only the U.S. gained any new rights³⁷. The Proliferation Security Initiative between the U.S. and Liberia accords each country the right to board, search, and detain any cargo of any vessel on the high seas, flying another country’s flag and is suspected of trafficking in weapons of mass destruction. However, Liberia has no navy but does have the second largest shipping registry in the world. Hopefully, other reciprocal rights will follow with others to exercise in the future. Any institutional change is always more palatable when there is a

benefit to everyone. Any change should be linked to providing a public good, such as stifling terrorism or stabilizing the global economy. It will be necessary to establish that the proposal is supplying something important globally. Basically, the U.S. needs to downplay self interest and as a result, cooperation will be more likely.

The third element is to link proposed changes to widely accepted parts of the current order. The institutional change must be seen as consistent with the wider world order. The U.S. needs to use its diplomatic and intellectual resources to persuade others of the reform's links to well-established precedents. For instance in the above example for the Proliferation Security Initiative, a point was made to stress that it was built on existing non proliferation treaties and was consistent with international legal authorities and international law. The U.S. must be seen as using the power of the U.S. to bring the world together, and not be seen as tearing the world apart. Understanding and being able to articulate the links that tie together the world order is essential. Events in other lands increasingly affect the U.S., and to ensure the security of the U.S. consistency with establishing a new world order is essential. The new world order must work towards a peaceful and prosperous world by seeking cooperative solutions consistent with the wider world order and not just for the sake of the security of the U.S.

In addition to ensure changes are consistent with the current order, it is also necessary to make sure the changes are consistent with past positions. In calling for reform, the U.S. should not engage in purely legal arguments. The argument should also be based upon the idea that the changing global circumstances require the proposed fix. A resurgence of persuasion, argument, and diplomacy should become the cornerstone to drive acceptance of the proposed change. Crafting preventive

measures should not be done in a vacuum but only after consultation with allies. A case in point is when U. S. officials used to travel to Paris, France for extensive consultation over any new NATO policy³⁸. This no longer occurs. The U.S. does not have to win over every nation, but we do have to win over those nations that influence the decisions of other nations.

The world will increasingly be confronted with new challenges that the current international order is ill equipped to handle. The U.S. needs to take charge and provide leadership in international organizations to address these new challenges. These international organizations need to adapt to address these challenges. Once the need for change is acknowledged, it will open the door for the U.S. to provide leadership and institute the changes that best meet U.S. national security needs. The changes will not be easy and may never occur, however, the U.S. is up to the challenge and the effort is worthy of the challenge. It is up to the U.S. to meet this challenge and invest in diplomatic and negotiation skills in order to be successful.

The U.S. should not lose the Exceptionalism identity. We need to preserve the values that make us a unique nation and remain a model for humanity and a crusader for human rights. We must safeguard our security and ensure internal and external freedoms while assisting with global security but not solely responsible for global security. The best way to accomplish this is through international organizations and becoming exceptional, not only for military power, but also for diplomacy and economic power. Utilizing three basic cornerstones for foreign policy, and working to reform international organizations will lead the U.S. into the next century. These efforts will institute a new world order of cooperation, and progress for the world towards peace

and security, and benefits for all as major goals. It is now time to become exceptional in our ability to execute diplomacy and economic stability, as well as with military power. Being a great power in the world comes with a responsibility, and it is time to begin to meet this responsibility with something other than a military reaction.

Endnotes

¹ Gerald Lee Gutek, *Philosophical and Ideological Voices in Education*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2004).

² Howard Zinn, *The Power and the Glory*, Summer 2005, <http://bostonreview.net/BR30.3/zinn.html> (accessed March 3, 2006).

³ Ibid.

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⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Stewart Patrick, ed. *Multilateralism and U.S. Foreign Policy* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

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¹⁷ Ibid.

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²⁴ Brooks and Wohlforth.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Morton H. Halperin, Jeffrey Laurenti, Peter Rundlet, & Spencer P. Boyer (Eds), 2007. *Power and Superpower: Global Leadership and Exceptionalism in the 21st Century*. New York: The Century Press Foundation.

³¹ Brooks and Wohlforth.

³² Patrick, ed.

³³ Brooks and Wohlforth

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The five reforms are introduced in the article titled: "Reshaping the World Order" by Stephan G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth.

³⁷ Brooks and Wohlforth.

³⁸ Ibid.