

## Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush: Historical Comparisons of Ends and Means in Their Foreign Policies

Presidents Woodrow Wilson and George W. Bush appealed to historic American ideals to justify their new foreign policies. During World War I and after September 11, 2001, they both led the nation into war for the avowed purpose of protecting traditional values and institutions at home and of expanding these throughout the world, promising to make freedom and democracy the foundation for peace. They assigned a redemptive role to the United States, fighting evil to create a new international order. Various commentators have recognized these parallels between Wilson and Bush. Often focusing on their common ideology, they have neglected the disparity between ends and means in the foreign policies of these two presidents. Historians who have placed Bush in the mainstream of the American diplomatic tradition, moreover, have exaggerated historical continuity by ignoring his willingness to use unprecedented means of preemptive war to achieve traditional Wilsonian goals.

Pundits and scholars have offered various arguments to explain or justify the Bush Doctrine. Some, agreeing with Bush, have endorsed his global war on terrorism by arguing that September 11 marked the beginning of a radically new era in world history. Novel threats, they claimed, required a new national security strategy, which justified America's preventive war in Iraq as well as its retaliatory war in Afghanistan. Others, also concurring with Bush, have exalted America's providential mission to transform the world, and thus to secure its peace. In combination, these two arguments gave Bush a rationale for his new national security doctrine: given the radically new dangers confronting the United States and its unique (or providential) opportunity as the world's pre-eminent superpower, it needed to take a proactive stance toward potential rivals and terrorists. While not necessarily rejecting either of these two arguments, some historians have noted pre-9/11 precedents for the president's national security strategy. They have sought to give legitimacy to the Bush Doctrine by identifying it with well-established American traditions. Placing Bush's foreign policy in the mainstream of U.S. history, they have exaggerated historical continuity and overlooked significant differences between him and previous



**Figure 1:** Woodrow Wilson portrait, November 5, 1912.

<http://memory.loc.gov/service/pnp/cph/3c30000/3c32000/3c32900/3c32907v.jpg>.

(Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.)

presidents. In doing so, they have offered questionable historical interpretations as well as dubious foreign-policy advice.

Using Wilson as an important point of reference, this essay analyzes the debate over Bush's global war on terrorism and its place in U.S. diplomatic history. Rather than dealing with all comparisons between the two presidents, it evaluates only some of the most important recent books and articles that highlight similarities and differences between their historic roles in U.S. foreign relations. It does not focus on other aspects of their lives and statecraft such as common roots in the American South, race and religion as factors in their private identities and public policies, and contrasts between their so-called progressive or conservative views on the government's role in the political economy and society. Nor does it examine all facets of their respective foreign policies. These merit further attention, but will not be covered here except to the extent that authors of the cited works have alluded to them.

Focusing on ideology, Stanford University historian David M. Kennedy stressed historical continuity from Wilson to Bush. In the *Atlantic* (March 2005), he attested that Bush owed his foreign-policy principles to Wilson, whether he knew it or not. Kennedy identified Bush not only with Wilson and his legacy but also with an earlier American heritage from which Wilsonianism had emerged. "Many critics have berated Bush," Kennedy remarked, "accusing him of jetti-



**Figure 2:** Woodrow Wilson at White House desk, c 1918.  
<http://memory.loc.gov/service/pnp/cph/3a00000/3a01000/3a01400/3a01427r.jpg>.  
 (Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.)

soning two centuries of tradition and abandoning the high ground from which Americans have historically waged war with stouthearted moral confidence. But although this criticism is valid in many ways, Bush's approach also reaffirms what may well be America's only consistent tradition in foreign policy." Wilsonian ideals guided Bush's thinking, Kennedy avowed, although his doctrine of preemption marked a radical departure in American diplomacy. According to Kennedy, Bush's approach to the global war on terrorism conformed to historic American goals, but his willingness to attack first was unprecedented. "George W. Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy proclaimed a new American right to wage preventive war," noted Kennedy, who observed this novel assertion but did not question it. "Following the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, Bush declared, it was simply too risky *not* to act pre-emptively. Whatever the merits, this doctrine is a radical departure for American diplomacy."<sup>1</sup>

Kennedy correctly identified that the Bush Doctrine both adhered to and departed from the American diplomatic tradition, but, focusing on ends rather than means, he neglected to explain this dual characteristic. Only in one brief reference to 1775, 1861, and 1941 did he deal with the actual conduct of

1. David M. Kennedy, "What 'W' Owes to 'WW,'" *Atlantic* 295 (March 2005): 36.

Americans at the start of war as compared with the American ideals that were used to justify war, noting that “at Concord Bridge, Fort Sumter, and Pearl Harbor it was America’s adversaries who fired the first shot.”<sup>2</sup> Throughout the remainder of the article Kennedy disregarded differences between the two presidents in practice. He concentrated on ideology rather than the actual conduct of American diplomacy, on ends rather than means, emphasizing ideological continuity from Wilson to Bush. As a consequence, his predominant message was that Bush’s global war on terrorism conformed to—rather than departed from—the American diplomatic tradition. History was apparently on the forty-third president’s side.

Kennedy stressed the Bush Doctrine’s proclamation of “the values of freedom” and “the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade” for “every corner of the world.” He observed: “Those idealistic—some would say hubristic—words uncannily echo Woodrow Wilson’s rationale for American participation in World War I.” Whether Bush acknowledged his debt to Wilson, Kennedy argued, “Wilson would recognize George W. Bush as his natural successor.” Bush’s strategy for fighting the global war on terrorism adhered to the tenets of Wilsonianism. Both presidents believed they were pursuing the only way to create the kind of world in which they wanted to live. Kennedy emphasized, moreover, that “Wilson did not think that what came to be known, and often derided, as ‘Wilsonianism’ was just a policy selected from a palette of possible choices. Rather, he saw it as the sole approach to international relations that his countrymen would embrace as consistent with their past and their principles. Wilson did not so much invent American foreign policy as discover it.” He rejected both traditional isolationism and “the timeless precepts of diplomatic realism, or *realpolitik*” in his response to the Great War in Europe. As Kennedy further noted, “Two assumptions underlay Wilson’s thinking: [1] that the circumstances of the modern era were utterly novel, and [2] that providence had entrusted America with a mandate to carry out a singular mission in the world.” Bush shared these two assumptions, which guided his response to September 11. “Wilson’s ideas continue to dominate American foreign policy in the twenty-first century,” Kennedy concluded. “In the aftermath of 9/11 they have, if anything, taken on even greater vitality.”<sup>3</sup>

Like Kennedy, University of Virginia historian Melvyn P. Leffler also placed the Bush Doctrine in the mainstream of the American diplomatic tradition. “My argument,” he affirmed in *Diplomatic History* (June 2005), “is that there is more continuity than change in the policies of the Bush administration. Bush’s rhetoric and actions have deep roots in the history of American foreign policy.” Yet there were also “important changes,” he added. Leffler stressed the importance of “good judgment.” At times of crisis, he argued, Americans have tended to

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2. *Ibid.*, 36.

3. *Ibid.*, 36–40.

focus on their ideals—or their belief in the nation’s universal mission—to mobilize their power to deal with the perceived threats. Their redefinition of interests would emerge from this assertion of values in response to new dangers. After 9/11, the Bush Doctrine exemplified this pattern. In Leffler’s view, its most important characteristic was its “overriding goal” of promoting an international order favorable to freedom. That goal was more significant than the doctrine’s widely criticized features of preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony. Thus, like Kennedy, Leffler stressed the ideological continuity in Bush’s foreign policy. He placed it in the historic tradition of the Open Door, Wilson’s Fourteen Points, the Atlantic Charter, and the Truman Doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

Going beyond Kennedy, Leffler argued that the Bush Doctrine’s features of preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony were also not as new as critics alleged. He found precedents for all of these in twentieth-century presidencies from Theodore Roosevelt to Bill Clinton, especially during the Cold War. Thus, he concluded, Bush’s dismissal of deterrence, containment, military alliances, and multilateralism in his global war on terrorism fell short of a “revolutionary” departure from the established pattern of American foreign relations. In his analysis of the Bush Doctrine, however, Leffler exaggerated the significance of so-called precedents. For instance, he cited Clinton’s approval of preemptive action in his June 1995 Presidential Decision Directive 95 as an antecedent of the Bush Doctrine. To protect American citizens and their facilities at home and abroad from terrorism, Clinton directed that “the U.S. shall pursue vigorously efforts to deter and preempt, apprehend and prosecute, or assist other governments to prosecute, individuals who perpetrate or plan to perpetrate such attacks.”<sup>5</sup> Identifying Clinton’s directive as a precedent for Bush’s so-called preemptive war against Iraq, Leffler overlooked the magnitude of difference between Clinton’s authorization of preemptive action against “individuals” and Bush’s full-scale war against a foreign nation. Although they shared the common goal of stopping terrorism, Bush’s preventive war against Iraq marked a radical departure from Clinton’s far more cautious and limited approach to counterterrorism.<sup>6</sup>

Leffler’s focus on common ideological commitments to promote freedom and democracy obscured the substantial difference between Bush and twentieth-century presidents in practice and the concomitant disparity between ends and means in his foreign policy. Leffler concluded that “there has been no revolution in American foreign policy; there has been a frightening recalibration of the relationships between ideals and interests in the face of ‘existential’ threats.”<sup>7</sup>

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4. Melvyn P. Leffler, “9/11 and American Foreign Policy,” *Diplomatic History* 29 (June 2005): 395–96. See also Melvyn P. Leffler, “9/11 and the Past and Future of American Foreign Policy,” *International Affairs* 79 (October 2003): 1045–63.

5. Leffler, *Diplomatic History*, 404.

6. See also Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror* (New York, 2004).

7. Leffler, *Diplomatic History*, 413.

This argument is not persuasive. A realistic approach to counterterrorism would have asked not just what goals (whether defined as ideals or interests) the United States should pursue after 9/11, but also what methods it might legitimately adopt within the limits of its power to achieve the desired aims. It would have reassessed ends and means together. Except for recognizing the need for good judgment, Leffler neglected the very serious disparity between Bush's proclaimed goals and the actual practices of his administration, especially its unrealistic belief in war as the preferred way to make the world safe for democracy. As James Mann, writer in residence at the Center for Strategic and International Affairs, observed, "The ideals of Woodrow Wilson were to be revived, this time linked hand in hand with America's unprecedented military power."<sup>8</sup> Under the influence of neoconservatives, the president missed the opportunity to define a more realistic foreign policy.<sup>9</sup>

Lafayette College historian Arnold A. Offner criticized both the ends and means of Bush's new foreign policy. He understood that the United States needed more than good judgment in the implementation of the Bush Doctrine. Because it jeopardized both American ideals and interests, he denounced this redefinition of the U.S. role in world affairs. Accordingly, he rejected Leffler's conclusion that "George W. Bush's national security strategy (NSS) of 2002 is not revolutionary doctrine but largely consistent with America's long-held sense of universal mission and commitment to Wilsonian liberalism, and that presidents from TR to Bill Clinton have engaged in preemptive action." To the contrary, Offner rightly asserted, Bush's new policy was "an extremely radical and dangerous departure from accepted norms." Thus he questioned "both the means and ends of the Bush administration."<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to Kennedy and Leffler, John B. Judis, senior editor of the *New Republic*, argued that Wilson would not have recognized Bush as his legitimate successor. The Bush Doctrine marked a radical departure from Wilsonianism. In *The Folly of Empire* (2004), Judis criticized Bush for ignoring the lessons that TR and Wilson had derived from the American imperial experience a century earlier. Having learned from that so-called aberration in the American diplomatic tradition at the turn of the twentieth century, those Progressive presidents had exemplified a prudence that was lacking in Bush's reckless and relentless pursuit of an American empire. This was a terrible sacrifice, Judis believed. "The end of the Cold War," he thought, "created the conditions for finally realizing

8. James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York, 2004), 329.

9. See also Richard N. Haass, *The Opportunity: America's Moment to Alter History's Course* (New York, 2005).

10. Arnold A. Offner, "Rogue President, Rogue Nation: Bush and U.S. National Security," *Diplomatic History* 29 (June 2005): 433–35. See also Clyde Prestowitz, *Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism and the Failure of Good Intentions* (New York, 2003); Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York, 2005); Lloyd C. Gardner and Mary Young, eds., *The New American Empire: A 21st Century Teach-In on U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 2005).

the promise of Wilson's foreign policy." Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton pursued that promise of peace and prosperity in a new world order with a system of collective security among nations and an "open door" global economy. They understood that the United States benefited from international cooperation or multilateralism. "These years represented a triumph of Wilsonianism and of the lessons that America had learned from the Spanish-American War, two world wars, and the Vietnam War. But these lessons were entirely lost on the administration of George W. Bush that took office in January 2001." Again seeking to build a new American empire, Bush and the neoconservatives who now controlled U.S. foreign policy ignored the lessons that Progressive presidents had learned a century earlier. "Under Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson," whom Judis contrasted with Bush, "and later under a succession of presidents from Franklin Roosevelt to Bill Clinton, these experiences convinced Americans to change their attitude toward imperial conquests and toward nationalism in countries like the Philippines and Iraq."<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, Judis concluded, Bush had reverted to the Republican imperialism that had led to American occupation and annexation of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War of 1898.

As a liberal, Judis used an exceptionalist interpretation of American history to criticize Bush. Ironically, some historians who defended the Bush administration appealed to this same tradition, which affirmed America's unique role in world history. Neoconservatives also shared this historically liberal perspective. Judis identified Wilsonianism with anti-imperialism. Except for the momentary aberration after the Spanish-American War, he believed the United States had not created an empire. It had shunned colonialism, making America's experience quite different from Europe's. Its territorial expansion across North America, he thought, was not equivalent to European imperialism. He did not interpret this westward movement as founding a continental empire. The emergence of the United States as the world's preeminent power by the end of the twentieth century also did not appear to Judis as evidence that this nation had become a global empire.<sup>12</sup> Nor did he recognize what British historian Niall Ferguson, himself an advocate of a liberal American empire, called "the imperialism of anti-imperialism."<sup>13</sup> Bush's pursuit of an American empire thus looked to Judis like a radical departure from what he perceived as the nation's essential tradition of anti-imperialism.

For half a century, however, leading historians of U.S. foreign relations have rejected this exceptionalist interpretation of American history, which Judis still

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11. John B. Judis, *The Folly of Empire: What George W. Bush Could Learn from Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson* (New York, 2004), 7–9; John B. Judis, "What Woodrow Wilson Can Teach Today's Imperialists," *New Republic* 228 (June 9, 2003): 19–23.

12. For a more persuasive interpretation, see Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities & Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA, 2002).

13. Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York, 2004), 61–104.



affirmed and which had found its classic statement in historian Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis. In *Empire on the Pacific* (1955), Norman A. Graebner challenged Turner's explanation of progressive westward expansion across the North American continent. In the 1840s, he argued, President James K. Polk defined his imperial ambitions with reference to the natural harbors on the Pacific Coast, which were important for international commerce. The future American ports at Seattle, San Francisco, and San Diego were more important in Polk's thinking than the settlement of farmers and the development of democratic institutions on the western frontier. Moreover, by using the word "empire," Graebner avoided the euphemism of westward expansion, which advocates of Turner's frontier thesis used in their denial of American imperialism.<sup>14</sup> Richard W. Van Alstyne likewise recognized in *The Rising American Empire* (1960) that, beginning with the revolution, the United States had sought to create and expand its own new empire in competition with the Old World's great powers. The title of his book came from George Washington's vision in 1783 of a "rising empire" in the New World.<sup>15</sup> Thomas Jefferson reaffirmed this imperial future for the United States, which he called an "empire of liberty."<sup>16</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Americans had redefined their concept of empire, restricting it to colonialism, so that their westward expansion across North America did not appear to them as imperialism. They embraced Turner's frontier thesis, which affirmed a unique American national identity in contrast to the Old World. Although the European great powers were now engaged in imperialism, the United States adhered to its presumably anti-imperial tradition, except for its temporary aberration after the Spanish-American War. Along with Graebner and Van Alstyne, other leading historians long ago rejected this self-serving version of the American past and recognized the United States as the "imperial democracy" or "the new empire."<sup>17</sup>

In *The Myth of the West* (1995), Dutch historian Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt brilliantly analyzed the exceptionalist interpretation of American history, which Turner affirmed in his frontier thesis and Wilson proclaimed in his foreign policy. America, according to this mythology, was the "last empire" or the culmination of world history. Paradoxically, this vision of the New World originated from biblical and classical roots in the Old World. It enabled Americans, as the successors of this European intellectual heritage, to convince themselves that their "last empire" was not really like those of other great powers. Although other empires had risen and declined, the myth of the West assured Americans

14. Norman A. Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific* (New York, 1955).

15. R. W. Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (Oxford, 1960).

16. Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1990).

17. Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York, 1961); Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Ithaca, NY, 1963).



of their nation's (or empire's) progressive future. Time and place had come together in America, making this new land the "city on a hill" or "last frontier" or "end of history."<sup>18</sup> In his biography of *Woodrow Wilson* (1991), Schulte Nordholt showed the influence of this mythical exceptionalism on the president's "life for world peace."<sup>19</sup> It continued in his legacy of Wilsonianism throughout the twentieth century and then in the Bush Doctrine after 9/11.<sup>20</sup>

In Judis's view, however, Americans never engaged in building an empire, with a few exceptions particularly at the turn of the twentieth century. Their conduct of foreign relations manifested the nation's exceptionalism. They identified themselves as a "chosen people" with a moral or religious mission to redeem the world, but not through imperial conquest. Early American settlers had acquired a millennial, progressive view of history from the Protestant Reformation. Nineteenth-century Americans combined this linear understanding of history with the Enlightenment theory of stages of development from barbarism to civilization to justify their continental expansion. Out of this mixture came their rationale for Indian removal and their concept of "manifest destiny" to vindicate territorial conquest across North America to the Pacific. Until the "imperial moment" after 1898, however, they had resisted the temptation to acquire a colonial empire.<sup>21</sup>

According to Judis, a few Americans at the turn of the century, with illusions of omnipotence, endeavored to create a new empire. Prominent Republicans such as William McKinley, Henry Cabot Lodge, John Hay, Brooks Adams, and Theodore Roosevelt favored the acquisition of the Philippines even at the cost of war against the Filipinos who fought for their independence. Some Democrats, including Woodrow Wilson, also supported this new imperialism. Christianity, Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic racial theories, America's frontier experience, and the idea of democratic peace, Judis recounted, were all used to explain why the United States needed to establish an overseas empire. In an 1899 essay on "Expansion and Peace," Roosevelt expressed beliefs that resembled later justifications for the Bush Doctrine. "On the border between civilization and barbarism," TR wrote, "war is generally normal because it must be under the conditions of barbarism," given that "civilized man finds he can keep the peace only by subduing his barbarian neighbor." In an early version of democratic peace theory, TR added: "Fundamentally, the cause of expansion is the cause of peace. With civilized powers there is but little danger of getting into war. . . . In North America, as elsewhere throughout the entire world, the expansion of a

18. Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Myth of the West: America as the Last Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1995). See also C. Vann Woodward, *The Old World's New World* (New York, 1991).

19. Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *Woodrow Wilson: A Life for World Peace* (Berkeley, CA, 1991).

20. Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York, 2002); Walter LaFeber, "The Bush Doctrine," *Diplomatic History* 26 (Fall 2002): 543–58.

21. Judis, *The Folly of Empire*, 11–29.

civilized nation has invariably meant the growth of the area in which peace is normal throughout the world.”<sup>22</sup> Anti-imperialists criticized this new imperialism, but without success at first.

Eventually, however, the problem of control—or the limits of American power to conquer and remake the Philippines easily and cheaply—challenged TR’s imperial illusions and brought him to recognize the folly of empire. Increasingly aware of other foreign dangers, he gained greater appreciation for a balance of power in international politics. “Roosevelt’s newfound fear of war in Europe and Asia,” observed Judis, “led him to take positions that would be familiar to later American administrations but were at odds with his own stance at the end of the nineteenth century. In that burst of millennial enthusiasm, Roosevelt had imagined America playing a transformative role in creating a new-world imperial order; however, by the end of his presidency, he had reverted to more classic European balance-of-power conceptions.”<sup>23</sup>

Wilson also recognized the folly of empire, Judis believed. Although he maintained a millennial view of history, this Progressive president envisioned a new world order with national self-determination and collective security. His new League of Nations promised to dismantle the old international system of imperialism. “Wilson’s contribution to American foreign policy,” Judis argued, “can be expressed in religious terms. He attempted to transform the world in America’s image by transporting the original Puritan covenant between God and the American settlers into a covenant for the entire world that would exchange peace and democracy for obedience to the League’s laws. He would talk of creating a ‘conscience for the world.’”<sup>24</sup> Although the president called for a radical transformation of international politics to make the world safe for democracy, Judis did not identify this search for global hegemony—or what Wilson’s contemporaries called “international social control”—with the pursuit of an American empire.<sup>25</sup>

Judis praised Wilson for recognizing the roots of instability in the international system that generated World War I. These included the old balance of power in Europe’s diplomacy, the commercial rivalry over colonies, the philosophy that might is right, and the autocratic regimes that resorted to war against their democratic neighbors. Ending imperialism and promoting democracy were his solutions. Wilson’s Fourteen Points outlined his vision of a new world order to replace the old international system. In 1919 he succeeded at the Paris Peace Conference in creating the League of Nations, but failed to implement his

22. Ibid., 63. See also Warren Zimmermann, *First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power* (New York, 2002).

23. Judis, *The Folly of Empire*, 72.

24. Ibid., 79–80.

25. For a different interpretation, see Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge, England, 1987); Lloyd E. Ambrosius, “Woodrow Wilson, Alliances, and the League of Nations,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 5 (April 2006): 139–65.

principles in other parts of the Versailles Treaty. The president also suffered defeat at home when the Senate rejected this treaty and prevented the United States from joining the League. Nevertheless, in Judis's view, he had proposed the correct remedy. "While Wilson's attempt to reformulate America's foreign policy would fail to win the assent of his own country or of Europeans in 1919 and 1920," Judis concluded, "it would be revived during World War II and the Cold War. And to the extent that Americans would follow Wilson's approach—addressing the structural causes of war, including colonialism and protectionism—they would enjoy remarkable success over the remainder of the century." Above all, Wilson had fully discredited imperialism for all great powers, and especially the United States. Judis emphasized: "Americans would differ over the next decades as to how zealously they should attempt to dismantle other nations' empires, but no president for the remainder of the twentieth century would advocate the growth of an American empire. Wilson had finally laid that alternative to rest. Wilson also redefined the American millennium." He established the ideal of "a world of democracies."<sup>26</sup>

Judis praised the prudence of twentieth-century American presidents in generally resisting the temptations of imperialism. This required self-restraint, which was difficult when military intervention seemed to offer advantages. Even Wilson, who denounced Dollar Diplomacy, did not always adhere strictly to his principles. He intervened twice in Mexico, and took control over Haiti and the Dominican Republic. These experiences, however, made him more cautious. He did not rush into World War I against Germany. Nor did he succumb to the Allies' appeal for extensive intervention against revolutionary bolshevism in Russia. Applying the wisdom he had learned from his experience with the Mexican Revolution, Judis noted, Wilson asserted that "my policy regarding Russia is very similar to my Mexican policy. I believe in letting them work out their own salvation, even though they wallow in anarchy for a while."<sup>27</sup> FDR followed this model of prudence, even as he too affirmed Wilsonian principles during World War II. Judis emphasized that "Roosevelt defined the war as a struggle between good and evil—'between those who believe in mankind and those who do not'—but like Wilson, he did not allow this vision of Armageddon to cloud his understanding of the underlying causes of war and of what was necessary to prevent future wars."<sup>28</sup> FDR's Four Freedoms reaffirmed Wilsonian ideals but his statecraft demonstrated a realistic understanding of the limits of power. This same pattern continued during the Cold War. As Judis noted, "Roosevelt's successors would not abandon Wilson's approach to foreign policy, but they would have to adapt it to a divided world."<sup>29</sup>

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26. Judis, *The Folly of Empire*, 116–17.

27. *Ibid.*, 107.

28. *Ibid.*, 124.

29. *Ibid.*, 132.

Americans were sometimes tempted to abandon Wilson's legacy of anti-imperialism, Judis acknowledged. He cited only a few instances, however, given his identification of an empire with overseas colonies. The United States succumbed in Vietnam during the 1960s, he charged. Under President Lyndon B. Johnson's leadership, it "put itself squarely on the side of imperialism and colonialism. It was practicing an informal kind of imperialism. It also failed to take heed of what Wilson had learned in Mexico in 1914: that the United States, acting alone, could not transform countries overnight into models of democracy and freedom."<sup>30</sup> Oil and Israel also tested America's adherence to the Wilsonian principle of self-determination, Judis argued, particularly referring to U.S. support for the shah in Iran and for Israel against the Palestinian people. "The U.S. policy in the Mideast represented another instance where the Cold War clouded America's commitment to dismantling imperialism," he concluded. In the long run, however, Wilsonianism prevailed throughout the Cold War and at its end. President Ronald Reagan served as "the millennial harbinger" of democratic transformation worldwide. In his Westminster Speech to the British Parliament, he heralded this crusade for freedom. Yet, Judis noted, "Reagan, like Woodrow Wilson, would transcend the seeming limits of his own rhetoric and his religious background. Reagan would uncover the possibility of peace and of an end to the Cold War."<sup>31</sup> His statecraft evidenced prudence, not the reckless pursuit of ideological goals or imperialism.

Wilsonianism triumphed during the post-Cold War presidencies of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, but the younger Bush soon discarded that heritage, according to Judis. "In the 1990s, with the Cold War's end, the ideal of collective security, rooted in a century of bitter experience and an integrated world economy, had finally become capable of realization. Yet as a new century dawned, George W. Bush's administration abandoned this Wilsonian foreign policy for a toxic mixture of nationalism and neoconservatism."<sup>32</sup> Suffering from the illusion of omnipotence, it succumbed to the temptations of imperialism. Unfortunately, Judis argued, "America's new imperialism and unilateralism" sacrificed its twentieth-century commitment to multilateralism, ignoring the lesson that "the key to America's long-standing leadership has been its willingness to subordinate its singular will to that of international organizations and alliances."<sup>33</sup> Bush affirmed only Wilson's goals, not his methods. He and the neoconservatives who guided his conduct of U.S. foreign relations had espoused the Wilsonian vision of global democracy, but they sought to achieve it through unilateral means. In so doing, they unwisely and dangerously resorted to the folly of empire.

30. Ibid., 140.

31. Ibid., 143.

32. Ibid., 201.

33. Ibid., 207. For a similar argument, see G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ, 2001).

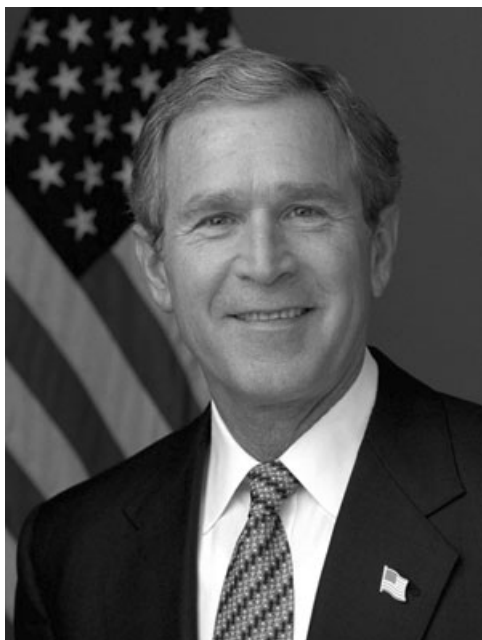
Judis presented an idealized version of Wilson as a counterpoint to Bush, but even so he made one fundamental point. Wilson's rhetoric might soar through the clouds as he outlined his global vision of making the world safe for democracy, but he was far more prudent in practice. He offered his ideals as universal principles, but he also exercised caution and self-restraint. His brother-in-law Stockton Axson recognized this feature in Wilson, attributing it to his Scotch and Scotch Irish lineage: "There was in him a kernel of tough common sense. He was an idealist with a strong realization of the practical."<sup>34</sup> Both idealistic and practical, Wilson proclaimed universal principles while he also limited his actions, as Judis noted in reference to his restraint in using military intervention against bolshevism in Russia. In theory, the president promised to make the world safe for democracy and to guarantee collective security for all nations. In practice, however, he never intended for the United States to take on this responsibility throughout the world. This contrast between theory and practice generated postwar disillusionment. He failed to live up to the hopes of various peoples, who believed that he betrayed his promise by not helping them fulfill their own expectations. Although not cited by Judis, the tragedy of the Armenian genocide exemplified this problem. Both during and after the Great War, Wilson refused to send U.S. troops into the Middle East to protect the Armenians from the Turks and later the Bolsheviks, leaving them at the mercy of their enemies. His rhetoric was universal but his actions were circumscribed, reflecting the limits of American power and also of his ideology that promised more than he could deliver.<sup>35</sup> Wilson's unwillingness to intervene in the Middle East even to help the Armenians, a white Christian people, was hardly a legitimate precedent for Bush's later pursuit of democratic transformation throughout the entire region. In comparing these two presidents, Judis correctly distinguished between ends and means in U.S. foreign policy. Bush reaffirmed Wilsonian principles, but his statecraft lacked Wilson's characteristic prudence.

In contrast to Judis, Yale University historian John Lewis Gaddis identified Bush with Wilson and the diplomatic legacy of the United States from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (2004), he traced this tradition from John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, and Polk, through McKinley, TR, William H. Taft, and Wilson, to FDR, and on to George W. Bush. Although somewhat critical of Bush, Gaddis generally praised his definition of a national security strategy as the culmination of the

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34. Stockton Axson, "Brother Woodrow": *A Memoir of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur S. Link (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 4.

35. Lloyd E. Ambrosius, "Wilsonian Diplomacy and Armenia: The Limits of Power and Ideology," in *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge, England, 2003), 113–45; Samantha Power, *"A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide* (New York, 2002), 1–16; Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York, 2003).



**Figure 3:** George W. Bush portrait, January 14, 2003.  
<http://www.defenselink.mil/photos/Feb2003/030114-O-0000D-001.jpg>.  
 (Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Washington, DC.)

American diplomatic tradition. This praise won for the historian a rare invitation to the White House to discuss his book with the president.<sup>36</sup>

In *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2005), Gaddis offered his suggestions for fine tuning Bush's grand strategy in his second term. He claimed that it offered the basis for a new bipartisan consensus in the aftermath of 9/11 and of Bush's war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. "A conservative Republican administration responded by embracing a liberal Democratic ideal—making the world safe for democracy—as a national security imperative," concluded Gaddis. "If that does not provide the basis for a renewed grand strategic bipartisanship, similar to the one that followed Pearl Harbor so long ago, then one has to wonder what ever would."<sup>37</sup> Although he recognized that the Bush administration had conflated prevention with preemption, Gaddis approved its "first act of pre-emption for preventive purposes: the invasion of Iraq." He praised the administration for attempting to win multilateral endorsement for this new war in 2003. He recognized, but then discounted, widespread foreign criticism of

36. John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); John F. Dickerson, "What the President Reads," *Time* 165 (January 17, 2005): 45.

37. John Lewis Gaddis, "Grand Strategy in the Second Term," *Foreign Affairs* 84 (January/February 2005): 14.

unilateral U.S. decision making. "President Bush's decision to invade Iraq anyway provoked complaints that great power was being wielded without great responsibility, followed by an unprecedented collapse of support for the United States abroad. From nearly universal sympathy in the weeks after September 11, Americans within a year and a half found their country widely regarded as an international pariah."<sup>38</sup> Despite this negative global reaction and the difficulty in winning the peace after quickly winning an apparent victory in the war, Gaddis insisted that "Iraq is not Vietnam." These unintended consequences and unforeseen obstacles notwithstanding, he thought "there is still time, then, to defeat the insurgency—even though the insurgents are no doubt also learning from their own mistakes."<sup>39</sup> He believed the Iraq War could still help achieve the larger goal of promoting freedom, noting that "President Bush has insisted that the world will not be safe from terrorists until the Middle East is safe for democracy."<sup>40</sup>

Like Kennedy, Gaddis focused on ends rather than means, praising Bush's definition of the purpose while discounting the costs and the gap between expectations and results. His suggestions for fixing the president's grand strategy, like the Bush Doctrine itself, did not include specific methods to achieve the general goals. He simply recommended that the administration might benefit from asking, what would Bismarck do? "The most skillful practitioner ever of shock and awe, Otto von Bismarck, shattered the post-1815 European settlement in order to unify Germany in 1871," Gaddis recalled. "Having done so, however, he did not assume that the pieces would simply fall into place as he wished them to: he made sure that they did through the careful, patient construction of a new European order that offered benefits to all who were included within it. Bismarck's system survived for almost half a century."<sup>41</sup> To suggest that Bush should emulate Bismarck's statecraft, as Gaddis did, was not very helpful. He did not explain what he thought Bismarck would have done. Moreover, if Bush were to take this advice seriously, he would have to jettison his own Wilsonian ideology, which Gaddis also recommended as the basis for national consensus. Wilson and Bush proclaimed the same American ideals to justify their wars, as both Kennedy and Gaddis affirmed. In this regard, the Bush Doctrine did resemble Wilson's vision of a new world order.<sup>42</sup> However, Bush's grand strategy, even as Gaddis sought to fix it, failed to connect Wilsonian goals with specific policies to make the world safe for democracy.<sup>43</sup> In this regard, too, Bush followed Wilson's legacy of failure to unite ends and means.

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38. Ibid., 5–6.

39. Ibid., 8–9.

40. Ibid., 12.

41. Ibid., 15.

42. See also Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism*, 16–18.

43. On this failure in Iraq, see Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 83 (September/October 2004): 34–56; Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York, 2005).



In his book, Gaddis developed the thesis that Bush's global war on terrorism adhered to well-established traditions in U.S. diplomacy. He traced the key ideas in the Bush Doctrine back through the American experience. He noted that in the nineteenth century, as Frederick Jackson Turner and C. Vann Woodward had observed, Americans benefited from the availability of both free land and free security. During the War of 1812, the British army attacked the national capitol in Washington, DC, burning the executive mansion on August 24, 1814, from which President James Madison and his wife Dolley had just fled. After that humiliating defeat, Americans sought absolute security through expansion, as James Chace and Caleb Carr recounted in *America Invulnerable* (1988).<sup>44</sup> To secure their own freedom, Americans began to enlarge their area of predominance, hoping thereby to escape from foreign threats. Gaddis emphasized that "for the United States, *safety comes from enlarging, rather than from contracting, its sphere of responsibilities.*"<sup>45</sup>

Gaddis credited John Quincy Adams as the chief architect of this expansionist plan for national security. Before Adams served as President James Monroe's secretary of state and then as president, he was already an experienced diplomat. At Ghent he had helped negotiate the end of the War of 1812. Gaddis stressed that "it was Adams, more than anyone else, who worked out the methods by which expansion could be made to provide the security that C. Vann Woodward, over a century later, would write about. These sound surprisingly relevant in the aftermath of September 11th: they were preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony."<sup>46</sup>

Preemption became the American practice, Gaddis argued, in dealing with the continuing European presence in North America and also with Native Americans. Adams justified General Andrew Jackson's invasion of Florida in 1818 as a legitimate response to raids across the southern border by Creeks, Seminoles, and escaped slaves. In pursuit of "security through expansion," Adams and Jackson thought it was appropriate to move into the areas of these "non-state actors" in Florida and elsewhere on the advancing frontier. Later as president, Jackson continued this same approach. Gaddis observed that "Jackson's argument—that an expanding 'civilization' spread out along an insecure frontier had the right of preemption—was a predictable extension of Adams's own thinking, as well as a powerful justification for such disposessions throughout the rest of the nineteenth century." In the 1840s Polk used the preemptive approach to annex Texas and then conquer the Southwest to the Pacific by resorting to war with Mexico. This continental expansion enhanced national security and justified preemption.<sup>47</sup>

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44. James Chace and Caleb Carr, *America Invulnerable: The Quest for Absolute Security from 1812 to Star Wars* (New York, 1988).

45. Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, 13.

46. *Ibid.*, 15–16.

47. *Ibid.*, 16–19.

According to Gaddis, the United States extended preemption beyond North America at the end of the nineteenth century. After the sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine* in 1898, President McKinley led the nation into war against Spain over Cuba and then called for annexing the Philippines and other Spanish possessions. Presidents during the Progressive era—Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson—also launched “preemptive interventions” into Caribbean and Latin American countries where instability might tempt the European great powers, especially Imperial Germany. “Concerns about ‘failed’ or ‘derelict’ states, then,” Gaddis concluded, “are nothing new in the history of United States foreign relations, nor are strategies of preemption in dealing with them. So when President George W. Bush warned, at West Point in June 2002, that Americans must ‘be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives,’ he was echoing an old tradition rather than establishing a new one. Adams, Jackson, Polk, McKinley, Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson all have understood it perfectly well.”<sup>48</sup>

Unilateralism also characterized the American practice in international relations, Gaddis argued. In his famous farewell address, President Washington had affirmed this stance, which later found expression in the Monroe Doctrine. As secretary of state, Adams played a key role in defining this doctrine. The United States sought its own security by separating the New World from the Old. While Americans avoided entanglements in Europe, they expected Europeans to refrain from interfering in the Western Hemisphere. Sometimes labeled as isolationism, although the United States never actually isolated itself from the rest of the world, unilateralism shaped American foreign relations throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. America’s standoffish involvement in World War I demonstrated its continuing influence. “The United States intervened decisively in World War I,” Gaddis observed, “but only as an ‘associated,’ not an ‘allied,’ power; and when President Wilson proposed a peace to be enforced by a League of Nations obligated to act against future wars, his own country repudiated it.” This rejection of multilateralism continued prior to World War II, he noted. “Unilateralism reached its apex during the 1920s and 1930s when, despite the power the United States now had to shape the course of events throughout the world, Americans refused to use that power lest it somehow compromise their own so rightly prized freedom of action.”<sup>49</sup> The resurgence of unilateralism in post-Cold War American foreign policy, first in Clinton’s administration and then even more in George W. Bush’s, was therefore nothing new.

Hegemony was also a well-established tradition in U.S. foreign relations, Gaddis emphasized. It too went back to Adams, who had sought an American preponderance of power over the North American continent. This would

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48. *Ibid.*, 19–22.

49. *Ibid.*, 25.

prevent the Europeans from maintaining a balance of power in the New World. Adams did not want the European empires to restrict the United States. Once Americans had achieved hegemony in North America, and thereby precluded a new balance of power here, the United States could expand its influence into South America. This American experience appeared to Gaddis still relevant in the post-Cold War era: "Let me suggest here only that, for all of his concern about taking on monsters abroad, had John Quincy Adams lived to see the end of the Cold War, he would not have found the position of the United States within the international system an unfamiliar one." What Adams had prescribed for North America now seemed to be applicable worldwide. "Despite the difference between a continental and a global scale," Gaddis argued, "the American commitment to maintaining a predominance of power—as distinct from a balance of power—was much the same in the 1990s as it had been in his day. Nor would Adams have detected evidence of hypocrisy cloaking ambition in what President Bush announced at West Point in June 2002: that 'America has, and intends to keep, military strength beyond challenge.'" Once more Gaddis placed Bush squarely within the American diplomatic tradition that Adams had defined. This "grand strategy of John Quincy Adams," which had become deeply "embedded within our national consciousness," configured the Bush Doctrine after 9/11.<sup>50</sup>

In the early twentieth century, Gaddis observed, American presidents had wrestled with the question of how far to expand American predominance to protect national security. Wilson gave his answer during World War I. Gaddis claimed that "in Wilson's mind, at least, the issue of how far the American sphere of responsibility must extend to ensure American security had now been settled: it would extend everywhere." His global vision for a new international order would guarantee collective security for the whole world. "Wilson's concept of a League of Nations," Gaddis argued, "implied a commitment, from all of its members and certainly from the United States, to act collectively to resist future aggression wherever in the world it took place. The war had shown that security was a seamless web: if it came apart anywhere, the fabric could unravel everywhere. The international community must therefore prevent such threats to peace from developing, and if necessary retaliate against whoever had broken the peace."<sup>51</sup> Affirming the wisdom of this global definition of American national security, Gaddis endorsed the perspective of St. John's University historian Frank Ninkovich, who had credited Wilson with originating the "domino theory" in U.S. foreign policy.<sup>52</sup> According to this theory, later applied in the Vietnam War, the United States could protect itself only by expanding its predominance to all parts of the world. It could not distinguish between primary

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50. Ibid., 30–31.

51. Ibid., 42–43.

52. Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 1994).

and secondary interests in different regions. No limits or balances or power could be tolerated in this conception of America's grand strategy. Bush embraced this Wilsonian legacy, and Gaddis affirmed it too, both believing that the national security of the United States in the twenty-first century required American global hegemony.

During World War II and the Cold War, however, the United States had accepted limits to its power and had refrained from seeking absolute security. Gaddis recognized this self-restraint in Franklin D. Roosevelt, who embraced Wilson's global understanding of national security but was more realistic. Because FDR thought the United States could never be safe in a world that permitted military aggressors to profit from war, Gaddis concluded "he was, in this sense, a Wilsonian, fully inclined to accept, as a principle, the seamless web metaphor for international security. He was also, however, a far more skillful leader than Wilson, for he never neglected, as Wilson did, the need to keep *proclaimed* interests from extending beyond *actual* capabilities. This was the great consistency that explained FDR's inconsistencies. It helps to account for the fact that his strategy brought two separate wars to almost simultaneous conclusions with the victor far stronger than at their beginnings."<sup>53</sup> In other words, his victorious strategy took into account both ends and means. Moreover, while winning the war and planning the peace, FDR expanded American hegemony from the Western Hemisphere to the rest of the world. "Equally significant," Gaddis also noted, "is the fact that Roosevelt pulled off this expanded hegemony by scrapping rather than embracing the two other key components of Adams's strategy, unilateralism and preemption."<sup>54</sup> He awaited Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor before leading the United States into World War II and then he adopted a multilateral approach to the wartime alliance and to postwar peacemaking, seeking American predominance in a new United Nations to replace the discredited League of Nations.

Throughout the Cold War, Gaddis recognized, the United States followed the pattern that FDR had established. It sought hegemony or a preponderance of power, but mostly adhered to multilateralism while seeking to deter Soviet military aggression and contain the spread of communism. "The history of American grand strategy during the Cold War," Gaddis noted, "is remarkable for the *infrequency* with which the United States acted unilaterally, as well as for top-level resistance to the idea of preemption and its related nuclear era concept, preventive war."<sup>55</sup> In practice, American leaders had accepted limits to their control of foreign affairs, accommodating themselves to a global balance of power. Other nations that feared Soviet or Communist threats joined the United States, forming alliances to implement deterrence and containment. These

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53. Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, 47.

54. *Ibid.*, 48.

55. *Ibid.*, 58.

policies had enabled the United States and its allies to win the Cold War. Nevertheless, Gaddis now believed, statecraft that had won World War II and the Cold War was no longer relevant after 9/11. Earlier precedents seemed more useful. Unlike Leffler, who found evidence of preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony during the Cold War, Gaddis traced Bush's national security strategy back to the American experience in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both historians, however, focused on U.S. foreign-policy traditions to explain the Bush Doctrine.<sup>56</sup>

After the Cold War and especially after 9/11, according to Gaddis as well as Bush, the United States needed a new grand strategy. Ironically, however, he did not develop the argument that novel threats in a radically new era in world history warranted the Bush Doctrine. He sought instead to legitimize it by emphasizing its well-established American historical roots. "What all of this implies, then," Gaddis asserted, "is a redefinition, for only the third time in American history, of what it will take to protect the nation from surprise attack. That requirement has expanded now from John Quincy Adams's vision of continental hegemony through Franklin D. Roosevelt's conception of a great power coalition aimed at containing, deterring, and if necessary defeating aggressor states to what is already being called the Bush Doctrine: that the United States will identify and eliminate terrorists wherever they are, together with regimes that sustain them. Respecting sovereignty is no longer sufficient because that implies a game in which the players understand and respect the rules. In this new game there are no rules."<sup>57</sup> Embracing this rationale for transgressing the limits of international law, Gaddis disregarded the potentially dangerous consequence that the Bush Doctrine would set the tone at the bottom of the chain of command for American torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib and other violations of human rights.<sup>58</sup>

Gaddis did not explain why the threats after 9/11 were so novel as to require the scrapping of containment and deterrence. He did not make this case for Bush's radical departure from the World War II and Cold War experience. Instead, he stressed historical continuity with an earlier legacy. Gaddis argued that Bush followed well-established traditions in U.S. diplomacy. Adams had originated the key ideas in the Bush Doctrine, he claimed, and Wilson had expanded them worldwide. This contention missed the crucial point, however, that historical continuity could not justify a radically new grand strategy. That would have required a different argument about discontinuity between the past and the future, not the one that Gaddis made to legitimize Bush's wars. The underlying logic was deeply flawed, moreover, by his America-centric focus,

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56. Leffler, *Diplomatic History*, 395–413.

57. Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, 85–86.

58. Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (New York, 2004).

although that probably explained why so many Americans, in contrast to foreigners, overlooked the Bush Doctrine's radical implications for the world's future.

Gaddis neglected the relevant history. He placed the Bush Doctrine within the historic traditions of the United States, and thereby explained its widespread appeal to Americans, but failed to assess its potential effects in the international context of the Middle East. He missed the fundamental point that Columbia University historian Rashid Khalidi made in *Resurrecting Empire* (2004). Khalidi observed that Americans typically lack interest in the history of other peoples, or even of their own past, because of their focus on the future. In contrast, Middle Eastern peoples have long memories of their encounters with the West. In its myopic vision, the Bush administration expected to remake the Middle East. It suffered from imperial hubris and ignorance of the realities in this region.<sup>59</sup> These self-inflicted limitations, Khalidi charged, "were grounded in willful ignorance and misinterpretation of the history, politics, and culture of the Middle East."<sup>60</sup> Moreover, this intentional misunderstanding or distortion prevented American policymakers from recognizing or acknowledging the inherent contradiction in seeking to impose democracy on other peoples in the Middle East or elsewhere. By its very nature, American or British military occupation of Iraq denied self-rule to its people. It might serve foreign interests, but, to the extent that it imposed control from outside, it denied democracy within Iraq.<sup>61</sup> To gain a realistic assessment of the Middle East, Khalidi argued persuasively, Americans needed to escape their myopic version of world history—or what Schulte Nordholt called "the myth of the West." Unfortunately, Gaddis failed to do this. He kept his focus on the United States and embraced its exceptionalism. He was not alone.

At the end of the Cold War, it had appeared to other triumphal Americans that world history was moving toward fulfillment of Wilsonian ideals. Francis Fukuyama, who served as a State Department policy analyst and later became a Johns Hopkins University political economist, proclaimed the imminent "end of history." He affirmed that "the fact that there will be setbacks and disappointments in the process of democratization, or that not every market economy will prosper, should not distract us from the larger pattern that is emerging in world history." He claimed that the "choices that countries face in determining how they will organize themselves politically and economically [have] been *diminishing* over time." Although human history had witnessed various types of regimes

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59. Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (Boston, 2004), vi–ix. See also Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); Anonymous [Michael Scheuer], *Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror* (Washington, DC, 2004).

60. Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*, 146.

61. *Ibid.*, 164–65. See also William R. Polk, *Understanding Iraq: The Whole Sweep of Iraqi History from Genghis Khan's Mongols to the Ottoman Turks to the British Mandate to the American Occupation* (New York, 2005).

in the past, he rejoiced that “the only form of government that has survived intact to the end of the twentieth century has been liberal democracy.”<sup>62</sup> This was now the only viable option for all countries.

Johns Hopkins University political scientist Michael Mandelbaum fully agreed. Although Wilson himself had failed to create a new world order based on his ideas of peace, democracy, and free markets, this “Wilsonian triad” had become the global reality by the twenty-first century. These were, Mandelbaum proclaimed, “the ideas that conquered the world.” He explained: “Wilson’s ideas did not take hold [in 1918–1919], another terrible war erupted two decades later, and his career came to be regarded as a failure, its details forgotten by all but historians. At the outset of the twenty-first century, however, these ideas had come to dominate the world. His prescription for organizing political and economic life and for conducting foreign policy are the keys to understanding the new world that emerged when the great global conflict of the second half of the twentieth century, the Cold War, came to an end.”<sup>63</sup> World history seemed to be progressing toward the triumph of Wilsonianism.

Less optimistic that Wilsonian ideals would continue to prevail after 9/11, Gaddis applauded Bush’s decision to use aggressive military force to ensure their success in this hostile environment. “So the formula,” he explained, “is Fukuyama plus force: the United States must finish the job that Woodrow Wilson started. The world, quite literally, is to be made safe for democracy, even those parts of it, like the Muslim Middle East, that have so far resisted that tendency. Terrorism—and by implication the authoritarianism that breeds it—must become as obsolete as slavery, piracy, or genocide: ‘behavior that no respectable government can condone or support and that all must oppose.’ Otherwise democracy, in this new age of vulnerability, will never be safe in the world.”<sup>64</sup> Making the world safe for democracy thus required perpetual war.

Bush’s unlimited pursuit of global hegemony resembled Kaiser Wilhelm II’s weltpolitik more than Bismarck’s realpolitik, although the president’s avowed purpose was different. In 1914, after the assassination of Austria’s Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Wilhelm II led Imperial Germany into a preventive war in Europe, justifying this aggressive military response as legitimate self-defense against the danger of state-supported terrorism. To retaliate against Serbia for its complicity in the assassination and thereby to protect the Austro-Hungarian and German empires against further attacks by terrorists or by regimes that supported them, he resorted to war, first in Europe and then beyond. Similarly, Bush led the United States into a global war on terrorism, rationalizing his use of military force with his new doctrine—a new Weltpolitik.

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62. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992), 45; Francis Fukuyama, “Beyond Our Shores,” *Wall Street Journal* (December 24, 2002), Editorial Page. Available at <http://www.opinionjournal.com>.

63. Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas that Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 2002), 6, 17.

64. Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, 90.



The Bush Doctrine extended the logic of Wilson's legacy far beyond anything that he had attempted, or that other U.S. presidents had regarded as necessary for national security. They had usually shown more prudence in keeping America's aims within the reach of its power. Gaddis acknowledged this radical departure. "It was one thing for a continental hegemon to threaten preemption within its own environs, as John Quincy Adams, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson had all done," he admitted. "It was quite another thing for a global hegemon to threaten it wherever necessary, as George W. Bush appeared to be doing."<sup>65</sup> This radical shift in the conduct of U.S. foreign relations, most apparent in Bush's decision for war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 2003, produced undesirable consequences. "Among these," Gaddis allowed, "was the fact that, within a little more than a year and a half, the United States exchanged its long-established reputation as the principal *stabilizer* of the international system for one as its chief *destabilizer*."<sup>66</sup> The Bush administration convinced most Americans that its preventive war in Iraq was merely a legitimate extension of its global war on terrorism, but this new war did not look that way to foreign observers.<sup>67</sup> They did not think that Bush had learned what Bismarck—and also what other American presidents—had understood: the importance of a state's self-restraint in international relations. The Bush Doctrine did not define or prescribe such limits on the pursuit of Wilsonian ideals. Gaddis affirmed it nevertheless, despite his own suggestion that Americans might learn from Bismarck's example.

Largely endorsing Bush's grand strategy for winning the global war on terrorism, Gaddis put forth some questionable interpretations of the American diplomatic tradition. In his review of *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, University of Virginia historian Norman A. Graebner identified several of these. He did not agree that Bush was following the precedents of John Quincy Adams. Although Adams had indeed approved Jackson's pursuit of Indians into Spanish Florida, this was quite different from Bush's policy of preemption to justify striking first in Iraq. Graebner noted that "Florida was contiguous territory, the threat was immediate, rendering the American response admissible under international law. There was no danger of Spanish retaliation, and Madrid recognized its responsibility. Adams's preemption of 1818 was no precedent for the U.S. invasion of Iraq."<sup>68</sup>

Graebner also rejected Gaddis's claim that Bush's unilateralism followed Adams's precedent. At a time when American and European interests diverged and when the balance of power in Europe prevented its great empires from

65. *Ibid.*, 100.

66. *Ibid.*, 101.

67. Hans Leyendecker, *Die Lügen des Weißen Hauses: Warum Amerika einen Neuanfang braucht* (Hamburg, 2004); Klaus Schwabe, *Weltmacht und Weltordnung: Amerikanische Außenpolitik von 1898 bis zur Gegenwart* (Paderborn, 2006), 466–96.

68. Norman A. Graebner, "Adamsian Unilateralism vs. the Bushian Imitation," *American Diplomacy* (December 2004). Available at <http://www.americandiplomacy.org>.

endangering U.S. security, there was no need for the United States to involve itself in European affairs. The Monroe Doctrine expressed this reality, promising U.S. self-restraint and expecting reciprocity from Europe. Adams opposed any kind of crusade to rescue Greece from Turkey or to liberate Latin America from Spain and Portugal. "Adams's unilateralism," Graebner argued, "was no greater precedent for American behavior following the 9/11 crisis."<sup>69</sup>

Likewise, Adams's pursuit of a continental empire was different. "His concept of American hegemony was equally limited," Graebner noted. "He claimed U.S. primacy on the North American continent, but he made no effort to acquire Canada, Texas, California, or Mexico. He opposed the Mexican War even as earlier he opposed the War of 1812. Adams's world was one of acute diplomacy, not war." He was not a wartime ideological crusader like Wilson and Bush. "Adams's concern with defending U.S. borders from pirates and Indians was hardly synonymous with Bush's determination to free the entire world of terrorists," Graebner concluded.<sup>70</sup> Unlike Gaddis, Graebner saw Adams as a diplomatist who understood the limits of power and sought to protect the United States without transforming the world through moral and military crusades. In other words, the ends and means in Adams's definition of U.S. foreign policy were coherent, in sharp contrast to Bush's rationale for his global war on terrorism.<sup>71</sup>

Graebner was not alone in questioning Gaddis's version of the American past. Princeton University historian James M. McPherson cautioned against the use of preventive war, noting that Americans had never started such wars with the exception of the South's attack on Fort Sumter. On April 12, 1861, the Confederate states launched a preemptive strike against the Union. Southern moderates, he observed, tried to warn their extremist colleagues against starting a war, preferring to await President Abraham Lincoln's actions. "Wait for an 'overt act' against southern rights before taking the drastic step of secession with its risk of civil war, they implored. But fire-eaters insisted that the South could not afford to wait until the North loosed another John Brown or other weapons of mass destruction." Rather than wait, southern states seceded from the Union, formed the Confederacy, and launched a preventive war at Fort Sumter. This war did not turn out well for the southerners, however. "Less than four years later," McPherson reminded contemporary Americans, "the empire of this master race lay in ruins."<sup>72</sup> By implication, he suggested that Bush imperiled the United States by repeating the South's mistake.

As both Gaddis and Judis noted, Wilson intervened frequently with U.S. military force in Caribbean and Latin American countries. Historians such as

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69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. See also Andrew J. Rotter, Mary Ann Heiss, Richard Immerman, Regina Gramer, and John Lewis Gaddis, "John Gaddis's *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience: A Roundtable Critique*," *Passport* 36 (August 2005): 4–16.

72. James M. McPherson, "The Fruits of Preventive War," *Perspectives* 41 (May 2003): 5–6.



**Figure 4:** George W. Bush on U.S.S. *Abraham Lincoln*, May 1, 2003.  
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/images/iraq/20030501-15\\_do50103-2-664v.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/images/iraq/20030501-15_do50103-2-664v.html).  
(Source: White House, Washington, DC.)

Frederick S. Calhoun have justified these actions, claiming that the president was promoting democracy.<sup>73</sup> Neoconservative military historian Max Boot agreed, emphasizing that “far from renouncing the interventionist policies of his Republican predecessors, Wilson expanded them. The stern Presbyterian professor believed that America had a duty to export democracy abroad, and he was

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73. Frederick S. Calhoun, *Power and Principle: Armed Intervention in Wilsonian Foreign Policy* (Kent, OH, 1986).

prepared to act on it.”<sup>74</sup> Viewing the president’s actions as typical of “the savage wars of peace” that the United States fought throughout its history, Boot argued that these small wars contributed to America’s rise as a world power. “While often portrayed as a soft, fuzzy doctrine,” he explained, “Wilsonianism often requires the use of force.”<sup>75</sup> Like Gaddis, Boot saw Wilson’s military interventions in the Caribbean and Latin American countries as precedents for George W. Bush’s preemptive war in the Middle East. This comparison, however, ignored Wilson’s failure to establish democracy in any of the nearby nations that U.S. forces occupied and his great reluctance to send U.S. troops into distant regions. He was slow to take the United States into World War I and to approve military intervention in revolutionary Russia. Only after German submarines sank three American ships did the president ask Congress to declare war against Germany. Only after the European Allies had repeatedly requested military intervention in Russia did he finally agree. These were not precedents for preventive war of the sort that Bush sought to justify with his doctrine of preemption. Moreover, these were not unilateral presidential actions. Wilson led the United States into World War I with the approval of Congress and he sent American troops into Russia at the request of the Allies. These actions demonstrated his cautious approach to the conduct of U.S. foreign relations, despite his rhetoric. Emphasizing his prudence, Judis made an essential point about a significant difference between Wilson and Bush that proponents of preemption, including Gaddis and Boot, missed when they identified the Bush Doctrine with Wilsonianism.

On the issue of multilateralism versus unilateralism, Judis and Gaddis were both partly right and partly wrong. Praising Wilson’s multilateralism, Judis stressed his key role in creating the League of Nations, an international institution that was essential to his new world order. But Wilson also protected unilateral American decision making during the drafting of the Covenant at the Paris Peace Conference and in his plans for the new League’s future proceedings. He insisted that all permanent members of the council must have a veto over any recommendation it might make to fulfill the promise of collective security, thereby ensuring that it could never act without American approval if the United States joined the League. Judis discounted this protection for unilateral U.S. decision making in the League, as did other proponents of multilateralism in the post-Cold War years.<sup>76</sup> This feature of the League, although not cited by Gaddis, supported his emphasis on Wilson’s unilateralism. Yet the president also genuinely wanted the League as an institution for the practice of

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74. Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York, 2002), 149.

75. Max Boot, “George Wilson Bush,” *Wall Street Journal* (July 1, 2002), Editorial Page. Available at <http://www.opinionjournal.com>.

76. See, for example, John Gerard Ruggie, *Winning the Peace: America and World Order in the New Era* (New York, 1996); Robert S. McNamara and James G. Blight, *Wilson’s Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing, and Catastrophe in the 21st Century* (New York, 2001).

multilateral diplomacy. His enthusiasm for the new League was substantially different from Bush's disdain for its successor, the United Nations. When Gaddis placed Bush squarely in the Wilsonian tradition, he neglected this important difference. Wilson combined both unilateralism and multilateralism in his approach to international relations, but Bush preferred to act alone.<sup>77</sup>

More clearly than Judis, Gaddis recognized Wilson's quest for global hegemony. The president promoted the interests of an American empire, albeit different from European colonial empires and therefore not called an empire. Taking him at his word, Judis depicted an idealized Wilson who opposed imperialism and promoted democracy. Despite the president's denial of imperial ambitions, and Judis's failure to recognize these, his ideology justified American hegemony in world affairs at the expense of European empires. His contemporaries called it international social control. Wilsonianism rationalized the American empire's global expansion. Despite his critique of European imperialism, Wilson endeavored to make the United States into the world's leading nation (or empire) after World War I.

Bush identified himself with this hegemonic legacy. Addressing the National Endowment for Democracy on November 6, 2003, he placed himself in the tradition of Wilson, FDR, and Reagan. "The advance of freedom," Bush said, "is the calling of our time; it is the calling of our country. From the Fourteen Points to the Four Freedoms, to the Speech at Westminster, America has put our power at the service of principle. We believe that liberty is the design of nature; we believe that liberty is the direction of history."<sup>78</sup> When Judis claimed that Bush abandoned Wilsonianism, he neglected his ideological debt to Wilson, which Kennedy and Leffler rightly stressed. Focusing on means rather than ends, Judis emphasized Bush's reckless pursuit of an American empire in contrast to Wilson's more cautious statecraft. Reversing the focus, Gaddis recognized Bush's ideological link to Wilson and their common pursuit of American global hegemony that might well be called an empire.<sup>79</sup> But, while affirming the Bush Doctrine as a grand strategy for national security in the historic tradition of Adams and Wilson, Gaddis ignored that Bush did not behave with the characteristic prudence of either Adams or Wilson. Nor was his statecraft like Bismarck's.

University of Texas historian Robert A. Divine understood the danger of focusing on ends while downplaying means in the conduct of U.S. foreign relations. He discerned that Americans, who have fought "perpetual war for

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77. Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC, 2003); Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge, England, 2004).

78. George W. Bush, "President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East," November 6, 2003. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106.html>.

79. David P. Rapkin, "Empire and Its Discontents," *New Political Economy* 10 (September 2005): 389–411.

perpetual peace,” have found it difficult to end wars. “All too often,” he observed, “U.S. leaders have failed to realize the close connection between the use of force in wartime and the political process of making peace.” He cited Wilson’s failure to write his idealistic principles into the Versailles Treaty as an example of unintended consequences. Divine concluded that, “for the United States at least, war is a messy and unpredictable way to deal with international problems. Americans enter into conflicts convinced that they can create a better and more stable world once their enemies are defeated, only to meet with unexpected outcomes and a new set of challenges. Perhaps a more realistic view of war, one that does not raise so many hopes for a brighter future, would be the lesson we should draw from our twentieth-century experience with armed conflict.” Accordingly, Divine advised that “an understanding of the utopian nature of the Wilsonian quest for enduring peace may be the surest guide for dealing with these future international challenges.”<sup>80</sup> It would enable Americans to avoid Wilson’s mistakes.

The Bush administration ignored this sage advice. In pursuit of Wilsonian goals, it disregarded the likelihood of unintended consequences from U.S. military intervention and the difficulty of converting military victory into enduring peace. Lacking even Wilson’s prudence in practice, which Judis stressed, Bush sought democratic transformation of the entire Middle East, beginning with Iraq. Gaddis, Divine’s former student, also ignored his mentor’s advice. He applauded Bush’s grand strategy of preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony without explaining how the United States might spread democracy and restore peace in Iraq or anywhere else. A preemptive or preventive war, unilateral action, and hegemonic behavior would not automatically produce the desired results. Gaddis did not clarify what Bismarck would have done, or what Bush should do, to turn an apparent military victory in Iraq into a durable political settlement with either democracy or peace. Kennedy too failed to address the hard questions that Divine raised. Emphasizing what Bush owed Wilson, he kept his focus on their common ideology, ignoring the crucial but difficult tasks of postwar nation building and peacemaking. Both Gaddis and Kennedy ignored the disparity between ends and means in the Bush Doctrine.

Walter Russell Mead, the Henry A. Kissinger senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations, also jumped onto the Bush bandwagon after September 11, 2001. Like Gaddis and Kennedy, he identified the Bush Doctrine with Wilsonianism and the American diplomatic tradition. He praised Bush’s grand strategy of preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony. Calling it “an American project—a grand strategic vision of what it is that the United States seeks to build in the world,” Mead reinterpreted American history to find its origins. In *Power, Terror, Peace, and War* (2004), he claimed: “This project—to protect our own domestic security while building a peaceful world order of democratic

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80. Robert A. Divine, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (College Station, TX, 2000), 85.

states linked by common values and sharing a common prosperity—has deep roots in the American past.” Like Gaddis, he focused on the American experience rather than novel threats in the world after 9/11. Explaining Bush’s grand strategy for the twenty-first century, in his view, was essentially “a project of historical scholarship and deductive reasoning.”<sup>81</sup>

Mead’s recognition of the United States as a global hegemon was not new. He had acknowledged the existence of an American empire, however different it might be from others. In *Mortal Splendor* (1987), he traced the rise of this “liberal empire” as the twentieth-century successor of the British Empire. He noted that Wilson had outlined his vision of liberal internationalism during World War I, but the United States did not follow him. During World War II, however, Roosevelt succeeded. The liberalism of his New Deal at home created the foundation for America’s liberal empire abroad. The United States fulfilled the vision of Wilson’s Fourteen Points and FDR’s Atlantic Charter and Four Freedoms during the Cold War. This liberal empire reached its zenith during the 1960s under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. It lingered on under Presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter.

Defeat in the Vietnam War took its toll, but other factors also contributed to the relative worsening of America’s place in world affairs. American hegemony, which had enabled the United States to establish its liberal empire after World War II, was no longer so influential in the 1980s. By that “Age of Decline” during Reagan’s presidency, America’s empire was clearly in transition. It could wane as well as wax, Mead now understood, as did Yale historian Paul Kennedy, who published *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987) in the same year. A liberal empire in decline, Mead warned, might be tempted to abandon its democratic politics in favor of militarism. “Politics must offer hope, real hope, and in the long run this can be sustained only by real progress,” Mead explained. “By politics, of course, we mean democratic politics. It is possible for military regimes like those throughout the U.S. sphere of influence to enforce a conservative vision with bayonets; perhaps this is the direction in which American conservatism has to travel if it wishes to retain power. If so, there will be no shortage of leaders willing to travel that road or of intellectuals willing to rationalize that decision, defending torture and dictatorship while preening themselves on their hardheaded realism and their affinity for the eternal values of Western civilization.”<sup>82</sup> In view of this prescient warning, it is ironic that Mead himself would later become one of those hardheaded intellectuals who rationalized the Bush Doctrine, identifying it with the militant nationalist heritage of Jacksonian realism.

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81. Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America’s Grand Strategy in a World at Risk* (New York, 2004), 7, 19.

82. Walter Russell Mead, *Mortal Splendor: The American Empire in Transition* (Boston, 1987), 185–86.



In *Special Providence* (2002), Mead stressed how American foreign policy had changed the world, joining other triumphalists such as Francis Fukuyama and Michael Mandelbaum. This victory required the United States to create an empire and act as a global hegemon. "Call it empire, hegemony, world order, or globalization," he noted, "the question of global economic integration under British or American auspices and the political strategies that advance this great process have been at or near the center of both American and British foreign and domestic politics for centuries."<sup>83</sup> For the United States, economic globalization and democracy went together, both shaping its grand strategy. "Although the word *globalization* is new," Mead explained, "and although the process has accelerated and deepened in recent years, globalization has been the most important fact of world history during the entire history of the United States. Because of our geographical situation and the commercial enterprising nature of American society, globalization has been at the heart of American strategic thinking and policy making for virtually all of our history."<sup>84</sup> Moreover, democratic governments did not necessarily promote international peace. "The widespread view of our times that democracies don't get into aggressive wars was not accepted by our predecessors," he observed. "The growth of democracy in the United States and Europe went hand in hand with an enormous increase in bellicosity in international relations."<sup>85</sup> Globalization did not enhance the prospects for peace as liberals, such as Wilson, had hoped when they advocated the spread of democratic and capitalist values and institutions.

In *Special Providence*, Mead defined four schools in the American foreign-policy tradition, each of which he identified with a prominent U.S. statesman. He associated Alexander Hamilton with promoting national capitalism and economic globalization, Woodrow Wilson with spreading democracy in a new world order of international law, human rights, and collective security, Thomas Jefferson with isolating the United States to avoid foreign entanglements and wars and to protect its own freedom and democracy, and Andrew Jackson with asserting national interests in a populist and militant way. His definitions of these schools were not precise, either theoretically or historically. Mead used "Wilsonian" as a label for more recent human rights agendas for people of color and women, although he acknowledged that Wilson had asserted the supremacy of white men in both American and international politics. His definition of democracy had marginalized women and people of color both at home and abroad. "Wilsonianism," Mead argued, "with all its virtues and defects, is a real thing. It is deeply, probably ineradicably, rooted in American culture and history, and those who hope to shape the country's foreign policy must come to terms

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83. Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York, 2002), 38.

84. *Ibid.*, 80.

85. *Ibid.*, 47.

with it one way or another.”<sup>86</sup> Unlike Gaddis, Mead identified John Quincy Adams and the Monroe Doctrine with the less belligerent Jeffersonian school. Moreover, he recommended this approach as a beneficial corrective to the post-Cold War foreign policies of Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, who had combined the Hamiltonian and Wilsonian schools, and sometimes the Jacksonian way as well, in their vigorous and sometimes militant pursuit of both economic and political globalization during the 1990s.

Recognizing the nationalist appeal of the Jacksonian school, Mead identified it with unilateralism and preemptive war. Explaining their approach to international relations, he noted that Jacksonians believed that “the United States must be vigilant, strongly armed. Our diplomacy must be cunning, forceful, and no more scrupulous than any other country’s. At times we must fight preemptive wars. There is absolutely nothing wrong with subverting foreign governments or assassinating foreign leaders whose bad intentions are clear. Indeed, Jacksonians are more likely to tax political leaders with a failure to employ vigorous measures than to worry about the niceties of international law. Of all the major currents in American society, Jacksonians have the least regard for international law and international practice.”<sup>87</sup> In short, they traditionally behaved in unilateral and preemptive ways, resorting to war whenever they thought it would serve national interests. Like Max Boot, Mead acknowledged that Americans had been willing to use power in fairly ruthless ways. He observed: “The United States over its history has consistently summoned the will and the means to compel its enemies to yield to its demands. Attacks on civilian targets and the infliction of heavy casualties on enemy civilians have consistently played a vital part in American war strategies.”<sup>88</sup> Mead argued that the United States should balance its Jacksonian nationalist belligerency and also its Wilsonian and Hamiltonian global impulses with Jeffersonian self-restraint. “There is no school whose perspectives we can afford to lose,” he concluded, “but in looking at the tasks we now face, it seems to me that the voice of the Jeffersonian school is the one that currently needs to be heard.”<sup>89</sup>

Yet Mead soon silenced the Jeffersonian voice in his own thinking about America’s grand strategy. After 9/11, the Bush administration had embraced the militant Jacksonian approach, combining it with the Hamiltonian and Wilsonian traditions of economic globalization and worldwide promotion of democracy and freedom. Now Mead, like Gaddis, affirmed the “Fukuyama plus force” formula to finish what Wilson had begun. In *Power, Terror, Peace, and War*, he prescribed what he called the American Revival. He now identified the decline of America’s liberal empire by the 1980s with the deterioration of its liberal political economy, which the Progressive presidents had promoted and FDR had

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86. *Ibid.*, 173.

87. *Ibid.*, 246.

88. *Ibid.*, 221.

89. *Ibid.*, 331.

established with his New Deal. This “kinder, gentler” capitalism, which Mead called Fordism, had flourished during the early Cold War, but was ebbing by the 1980s. Reagan began to replace Fordism with what Mead called “millennial capitalism.”<sup>90</sup> Believing that this new post-Fordist political economy was both desirable and inevitable, Mead advocated the adoption of U.S. foreign policies that would aggressively promote it, labeling these as the American Revival. “The Revivalists are as ambitious in foreign policy as they are in domestic affairs,” he noted. They reshaped the historic foreign-policy schools into a new, aggressive approach to the world. “The American Revivalists aren’t trying to establish a fifth party in American politics to contend against the other four; they are trying to take over all of the four older parties and remake them in the light of American Revival ideas.”<sup>91</sup>

In this new era of globalization, which Mead welcomed, American Revivalists combined the Hamiltonian, Wilsonian, and Jacksonian approaches to international relations. He observed that Revival Hamiltonians urged “unfettered competitive capitalism” and Revival Wilsonians aggressively pursued their agenda of promoting democracy, especially in the Middle East. “Revival Wilsonians, whose ranks include the majority of neoconservative policy intellectuals who have played such an important role in Republican foreign policy debates in recent years, have radically restructured the Wilsonian agenda,” he affirmed. “They put the first element—the linkage between idealism and security—on steroids, arguing, for example, in the case of the Middle East, that only a much more aggressive pursuit of American ideological values can deal with the security threats we now face.” Uninterested in nation building or international institutions, they nevertheless wanted to spread American ideology throughout the world. U.S. foreign policies should use the nation’s exceptionalism as the model for global reform. Mead explained that “Revival Wilsonians believe that traditional American values are so compelling, so demonstrably superior, and so widely popular that they can sweep and reshape the world.”<sup>92</sup> Rather than leaving this outcome to chance, however, they used military force to promote it.

The Bush administration, in Mead’s view, adopted the American Revival’s revolutionary ideology and applied it to Iraq. It employed Jacksonian means to fulfill Wilsonian purposes. He noted: “The neoconservative, Revival Wilsonian approach to the war shared some of this sense of [Jacksonian] military political realism, but added arguments that had less Jacksonian appeal. The neoconservatives saw the occupation of Iraq as the first stage in the reconstruction of the entire region. In this analysis, it was a war to make the world safe for democracy.”<sup>93</sup> Revival Wilsonians believed that Wilson had been too naive in expecting world history to move progressively toward the fulfillment of

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90. Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War*, 70–71.

91. *Ibid.*, 84.

92. *Ibid.*, 88–89.

93. *Ibid.*, 109–10, 117.

American ideals. It would take a strong military shove from the United States to ensure this outcome. Thus the Bush administration needed to adopt the radically new doctrine of preemptive war and apply it with unilateral action. Yet after Mead embraced the Jacksonian features of the Bush Doctrine as the way to fulfill Wilsonian goals, he hoped that the costs might still be avoided. He suggested tactical adjustments and burden sharing. "One can only hope," he concluded, "that in the remaining time in office, long or short, the Bush administration will keep its strategic vision, acquire more tactical skill, and build a broader national and international consensus for its policies. Without some improvement in execution and consensus building, history's judgment will likely be harsh."<sup>94</sup> While endorsing Bush's grand strategy, Mead hoped that minor changes in its implementation might produce a better historical conclusion. His advice was similar to Leffler's hope that good judgment could somehow compensate for the Bush Doctrine's inherent flaws.

Like Gaddis, who thought that Bush should learn from Bismarck, Mead failed to grasp that the Bush Doctrine committed the United States to a grand strategy that was incompatible with the tactical adjustments he now recommended. Bush's ideological pursuit of Wilsonian goals through preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony precluded any serious consideration of either Gaddis's or Mead's rather contradictory advice. Their suggestions were inconsistent with Bush's grand strategy, which they fully endorsed. Having joined the Bush bandwagon after 9/11, they could not effectively address the vitally important questions that critics were raising. Once they agreed that Bush's Wilsonian principles were the right goals and that his uses of military force unrestricted by international law or institutions were legitimate methods, they surrendered the possibility of challenging his foreign policy in any fundamental way. Mead abandoned his advocacy of Jeffersonian self-restraint as a beneficial corrective to Bush's relentless wielding of global power. The president's preventive war in Iraq appeared just as legitimate as his retaliatory war in Afghanistan. Identifying the Bush Doctrine with Wilsonianism and placing it in the mainstream of both American and world history, despite its radical or revolutionary features, Mead too became a hardheaded intellectual of the kind he had once criticized for being too willing to rationalize abuses of power in the name of "the eternal values of Western civilization."

Historically, Americans have appealed to their highest ideals while pursuing their own wealth and power. As University of Pennsylvania historian Walter A. McDougall emphasized in *Freedom Just around the Corner* (2004), they have been hustlers of the type that Herman Melville satirized in *The Confidence-Man* (1857). Both positive and negative, this historic American culture shaped the Progressive politics of Wilson's statecraft and his domestic and international legacy. "This three-fold American Dream of individual 'rags to riches' success,

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94. Ibid., 162.

collective social progress, and national crusades overseas is usually associated with the Progressive Era around the turn of the twentieth century," noted McDougall. "But the trinity dated back to the creation of the American colonies, while its assumptions were challenged well before 1900."<sup>95</sup> Keenly aware of idealism's persuasive power in American history, especially in U.S. foreign relations, McDougall resisted the Bush bandwagon after 9/11. He did not believe that the United States should attempt to promote the utopia of a democratized Iraq. Balancing ends and means, it should instead pursue a more realistic goal within the scope of its more limited capability.<sup>96</sup> He did not subscribe to an American exceptionalist interpretation of world history.

Nor did other realists succumb to the ideological appeal of the Bush Doctrine. Colorado College political scientist David C. Hendrickson noted the irony that realists such as University of Chicago political scientist John J. Mearsheimer had joined the Peace party, while liberals such as Michael Mandelbaum had joined the War party, which called for "Wilsonianism in boots."<sup>97</sup> Like Gaddis and Mead, many Wilsonian liberals, including those who had become neoconservatives, joined Bush's new crusade to make the world safe for democracy, but skeptical realists cautioned against the dangers of the Bush Doctrine. They were concerned about the means that he used, not just the ends that he promised. They recognized the limits of American power to change the world. Realists thought that circumspection, not ideological crusades, should characterize American statecraft in international relations. Some Wilsonian liberals, such as Judis, also advised the practice of prudence and the avoidance of false hopes. Mindful of the costs of war and the likelihood of unintended consequences, these critics were unwilling to believe that the Bush administration could fulfill its renewed promise to make the world safe for democracy.

Appealing to the old American hope of "freedom just around the corner," both Wilson and Bush proclaimed American ideals to justify their new foreign policies. Whether in 1917 or 2001 or 2003, they led the nation into war, promising to protect traditional values and institutions at home and to expand these abroad, thereby making freedom and democracy the foundation for world peace. They still affirmed "the myth of the West." They assigned a redemptive role to the United States, committing it to fight evil and create a new international order. After World War I, Wilson failed to make the world safe for democracy. His experience suggests that fighting wars to spread democracy and

95. Walter A. McDougall, *Freedom Just around the Corner: A New American History, 1585–1828* (New York, 2004), 7.

96. Walter A. McDougall, "What the U.S. Needs to Promote in Iraq," *American Diplomacy* (August 2003). Available at <http://www.americandiplomacy.org>. See also Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston, 1997).

97. David C. Hendrickson, "The Lion and the Lamb: Realism and Liberalism Reconsidered," *World Policy Journal* 20 (Spring 2003). Available at <http://www.ciaonet.org>, reviewing Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas that Conquered the World* (New York, 2003) and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, 2001).

thereby attain perpetual peace is more likely to result in unanticipated costs and unintended consequences. These costs and consequences may, at least temporarily, be obscured by focusing public discourse on ideology rather than methods, on ends rather than means, as the Bush administration has done.<sup>98</sup> Yet, like Wilson, Bush has not achieved his avowed purpose, and is unlikely to be more successful in the future. His presidency has suffered. A better understanding of both American and world history would have warned him against these potential failures. Sooner or later, historians will assess both the promises and the results of America's latest efforts to fulfill its global mission as earlier proclaimed by Woodrow Wilson and now trumpeted by George W. Bush.

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98. Belatedly acknowledging the folly of Bush's foreign policy, Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven, CT, 2006), 9, concluded that: "What we need, in other words, is a more realistic Wilsonianism that matches means to ends in dealing with other societies."

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