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Rethinking the National Interest American Realism for a New World

By Condoleezza Rice

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Summary: The Secretary of State reflects on the lessons of the past eight years.

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What is the national interest? This is a question that I took up in 2000 in these pages. That was a time that we as a nation revealingly called "the post-Cold War era." We knew better where we had been than where we were going. Yet monumental changes were unfolding -- changes that were recognized at the time but whose implications were largely unclear.

And then came the attacks of September 11, 2001. As in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the United States was swept into a fundamentally different world. We were called to lead with a new urgency and with a new perspective on what constituted threats and what might emerge as opportunities. And as with previous strategic shocks, one can cite elements of both continuity and change in our foreign policy since the attacks of September 11.

What has not changed is that our relations with traditional and emerging great powers still matter to the successful conduct of policy. Thus, my admonition in 2000 that we should seek to get right the "relationships with the big powers" -- Russia, China, and emerging powers such as India and Brazil -- has consistently guided us. As before, our alliances in the Americas, Europe, and Asia remain the pillars of the international order, and we are now transforming them to meet the challenges of a new era.

What has changed is, most broadly, how we view the relationship between the dynamics within states and the distribution of power among them. As globalization strengthens some states, it exposes and exacerbates the failings of many others -- those too weak or poorly governed to address challenges within their borders and prevent them from spilling out and destabilizing the international order. In this strategic environment, it is vital to our national security that states be willing and able to meet the full range of their sovereign responsibilities, both beyond their borders and within them. This new reality has led us to some significant changes in our policy. We recognize that democratic state building is now an urgent component of our national interest. And in the broader Middle East, we recognize that freedom and democracy are the only ideas that can, over time, lead to just and lasting stability, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq.

As in the past, our policy has been sustained not just by our strength but also by our values. The United States has long tried to marry power and principle -- realism and idealism. At times, there have been short-term tensions between them. But we have always known where our long-term interests lie. Thus, the United States has not been neutral about the importance of human rights or the superiority of democracy as a form of government, both in principle and in practice. This uniquely American realism has guided us over the past eight years, and it must guide us over the years to come.

GREAT POWER, OLD AND NEW

By necessity, our relationships with Russia and China have been rooted more in common interests than common values. With Russia, we have found common ground, as evidenced by the "strategic framework" agreement that President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed in Sochi in March of this year. Our relationship with Russia has been sorely tested by Moscow's rhetoric, by its tendency to treat its neighbors as lost "spheres of influence," and by its energy policies that have a distinct political tinge. And Russia's internal course has been a source of considerable disappointment, especially because in 2000 we hoped that it was moving closer to us in terms of values. Yet it is useful to remember that Russia is not the Soviet Union. It is neither a permanent enemy nor a strategic threat. Russians now enjoy greater opportunity and, yes, personal freedom than at almost any other time in their country's history. But that alone is not the standard to which Russians themselves want to be held. Russia is not just a great power; it is also the land and

culture of a great people. And in the twenty-first century, greatness is increasingly defined by the technological and economic development that flows naturally in open and free societies. That is why the full development both of Russia and of our relationship with it still hangs in the balance as the country's internal transformation unfolds.

The last eight years have also challenged us to deal with rising Chinese influence, something we have no reason to fear if that power is used responsibly. We have stressed to Beijing that with China's full membership in the international community comes responsibilities, whether in the conduct of its economic and trade policy, its approach to energy and the environment, or its policies in the developing world. China's leaders increasingly realize this, and they are moving, albeit slowly, to a more cooperative approach on a range of problems. For instance, on Darfur, after years of unequivocally supporting Khartoum, China endorsed the UN Security Council resolution authorizing the deployment of a hybrid United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force and dispatched an engineering battalion to pave the way for those peacekeepers. China needs to do much more on issues such as Darfur, Burma, and Tibet, but we sustain an active and candid dialogue with China's leaders on these challenges.

The United States, along with many other countries, remains concerned about China's rapid development of high-tech weapons systems. We understand that as countries develop, they will modernize their armed forces. But China's lack of transparency about its military spending and doctrine and its strategic goals increases mistrust and suspicion. Although Beijing has agreed to take incremental steps to deepen U.S.-Chinese military-to-military exchanges, it needs to move beyond the rhetoric of peaceful intentions toward true engagement in order to reassure the international community.

Our relationships with Russia and China are complex and characterized simultaneously by competition and cooperation. But in the absence of workable relations with both of these states, diplomatic solutions to many international problems would be elusive. Transnational terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change and instability stemming from poverty and disease -- these are dangers to all successful states, including those that might in another time have been violent rivals. It is incumbent on the United States to find areas of cooperation and strategic agreement with Russia and China, even when there are significant differences.

Obviously, Russia and China carry special responsibility and weight as fellow permanent members of the UN Security Council, but this has not been the only forum in which we have worked together. Another example has emerged in Northeast Asia with the six-party framework. The North Korean nuclear issue could have led to conflict among the states of Northeast Asia, or to the isolation of the United States, given the varied and vital interests of China, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. Instead, it has become an opportunity for cooperation and coordination as the efforts toward verifiable denuclearization proceed. And when North Korea tested a nuclear device last year, the five other parties already were an established coalition and went quickly to the Security Council for a Chapter 7 resolution. That, in turn, put considerable pressure on North Korea to return to the six-party talks and to shut down and begin disabling its Yongbyon reactor. The parties intend to institutionalize these habits of cooperation through the establishment of a Northeast Asian Peace and Security Mechanism -- a first step toward a security forum in the region.

The importance of strong relations with global players extends to those that are emerging. With those, particularly India and Brazil, the United States has built deeper and broader ties. India stands on the front lines of globalization. This democratic nation promises to become a global power and an ally in shaping an international order rooted in freedom and the rule of law. Brazil's success at using democracy and markets to address centuries of pernicious social inequality has global resonance. Today, India and Brazil look outward as never before, secure in their ability to compete and succeed in the global economy. In both countries, national interests are being redefined as Indians and Brazilians realize their direct stake in a democratic, secure, and open international order -- and their commensurate responsibilities for strengthening it and defending it against the major transnational challenges of our era. We have a vital interest in the success and prosperity of these and other large multiethnic democracies with global reach, such as Indonesia and South Africa. And as these emerging powers change the geopolitical landscape, it will be important that international institutions also change to reflect this reality. This is why President Bush has made clear his support for a reasonable expansion of the UN Security Council.

SHARED VALUES AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

As important as relations are with Russia and China, it is our work with our allies, those with whom we share values, that is transforming international politics -- for this work presents an opportunity to expand the ranks of well-governed, law-abiding democratic states in our world and to defeat challenges to this vision of international order. Cooperation with our democratic allies, therefore, should not be judged simply by how we relate to one another. It should be judged by the work we do together to defeat terrorism and extremism, meet global challenges, defend human rights and dignity, and support new democracies.

In the Americas, this has meant strengthening our ties with strategic democracies such as Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Chile in order to further the democratic development of our hemisphere. Together, we have supported

struggling states, such as Haiti, in locking in their transitions to democracy and security. Together, we are defending ourselves against drug traffickers, criminal gangs, and the few autocratic outliers in our democratic hemisphere. The region still faces challenges, including Cuba's coming transition and the need to support, unequivocally, the Cuban people's right to a democratic future. There is no doubt that centuries-old suspicions of the United States persist in the region. But we have begun to write a new narrative that speaks not only to macroeconomic development and trade but also to the need for democratic leaders to address problems of social justice and inequality.

I believe that one of the most compelling stories of our time is our relationship with our oldest allies. The goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace is very close to completion. The United States welcomes a strong, united, and coherent Europe. There is no doubt that the European Union has been a superb anchor for the democratic evolution of eastern Europe after the Cold War. Hopefully, the day will come when Turkey takes its place in the EU.

Membership in the EU and NATO has been attractive enough to lead countries to make needed reforms and to seek the peaceful resolution of long-standing conflicts with their neighbors. The reverse has been true as well: the new members have transformed these two pillars of the transatlantic relationship. Twelve of the 28 members of NATO are former "captive nations," countries once in the Soviet sphere. The effect of their joining the alliance is felt in a renewed dedication to promoting and protecting democracy. Whether sending troops to Afghanistan or Iraq or fiercely defending the continued expansion of NATO, these states have brought new energy and fervor to the alliance.

In recent years, the mission and the purpose of the alliance have also been transformed. Indeed, many can remember when NATO viewed the world in two parts: Europe and "out of area," which was basically everywhere else. If someone had said in 2000 that NATO today would be rooting out terrorists in Kandahar, training the security forces of a free Iraq, providing critical support to peacekeepers in Darfur, and moving forward on missile defenses, hopefully in partnership with Russia, who would have believed him? The endurance and resilience of the transatlantic alliance is one reason that I believe Lord Palmerston got it wrong when he said that nations have no permanent allies. The United States does have permanent allies: the nations with whom we share common values.

Democratization is also deepening across the Asia-Pacific region. This is expanding our circle of allies and advancing the goals we share. Indeed, although many assume that the rise of China will determine the future of Asia, so, too -- and perhaps to an even greater degree -- will the broader rise of an increasingly democratic community of Asian states. This is the defining geopolitical event of the twenty-first century, and the United States is right in the middle of it. We enjoy a strong, democratic alliance with Australia, with key states in Southeast Asia, and with Japan -- an economic giant that is emerging as a "normal" state, capable of working to secure and spread our values both in Asia and beyond. South Korea, too, has become a global partner whose history can boast an inspiring journey from poverty and dictatorship to democracy and prosperity. Finally, the United States has a vital stake in India's rise to global power and prosperity, and relations between the two countries have never been stronger or broader. It will take continued work, but this is a dramatic breakthrough for both our strategic interests and our values.

It is now possible to speak of emerging democratic allies in Africa as well. Too often, Africa is thought of only as a humanitarian concern or a zone of conflict. But the continent has seen successful transitions to democracy in several states, among them Ghana, Liberia, Mali, and Mozambique. Our administration has worked to help the democratic leaders of these and other states provide for their people -- most of all by attacking the continental scourge of HIV/AIDS in an unprecedented effort of power, imagination, and mercy. We have also been an active partner in resolving conflicts -- from the conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which ended the civil war between the North and the South in Sudan, to active engagement in the Great Lakes region, to the intervention of a small contingent of U.S. military forces in coordination with the African Union to end the conflict in Liberia. Although conflicts in Darfur, Somalia, and other places tragically remain violent and unresolved, it is worth noting the considerable progress that African states are making on many fronts and the role that the United States has played in supporting African efforts to solve the continent's greatest problems.

A DEMOCRATIC MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

Although the United States' ability to influence strong states is limited, our ability to enhance the peaceful political and economic development of weak and poorly governed states can be considerable. We must be willing to use our power for this purpose -- not only because it is necessary but also because it is right. Too often, promoting democracy and promoting development are thought of as separate goals. In fact, it is increasingly clear that the practices and institutions of democracy are essential to the creation of sustained, broad-based economic development -- and that market-driven development is essential to the consolidation of democracy. Democratic development is a unified political-economic model, and it offers the mix of flexibility and stability that best enables states to seize globalization's opportunities and manage its challenges. And for those who think otherwise: What real alternative worthy of America is there?

Democratic development is not only an effective path to wealth and power; it is also the best way to ensure that these

benefits are shared justly across entire societies, without exclusion, repression, or violence. We saw this recently in Kenya, where democracy enabled civil society, the press, and business leaders to join together to insist on an inclusive political bargain that could stem the country's slide into ethnic cleansing and lay a broader foundation for national reconciliation. In our own hemisphere, democratic development has opened up old, elite-dominated systems to millions on the margins of society. These people are demanding the benefits of citizenship long denied them, and because they are doing so democratically, the real story in our hemisphere since 2001 is not that our neighbors have given up on democracy and open markets; it is that they are broadening our region's consensus in support of democratic development by ensuring that it leads to social justice for the most marginalized citizens.

The untidiness of democracy has led some to wonder if weak states might not be better off passing through a period of authoritarian capitalism. A few countries have indeed succeeded with this model, and its allure is only heightened when democracy is too slow in delivering or incapable of meeting high expectations for a better life. Yet for every state that embraces authoritarianism and manages to create wealth, there are many, many more that simply make poverty, inequality, and corruption worse. For those that are doing pretty well economically, it is worth asking whether they might be doing even better with a freer system. Ultimately, it is at least an open question whether authoritarian capitalism is itself an indefinitely sustainable model. Is it really possible in the long run for governments to respect their citizen's talents but not their rights? I, for one, doubt it.

For the United States, promoting democratic development must remain a top priority. Indeed, there is no realistic alternative that we can -- or should -- offer to influence the peaceful evolution of weak and poorly governed states. The real question is not whether to pursue this course but how.

We first need to recognize that democratic development is always possible but never fast or easy. This is because democracy is really the complex interplay of democratic practices and culture. In the experience of countless nations, ours especially, we see that culture is not destiny. Nations of every culture, race, religion, and level of development have embraced democracy and adapted it to their own circumstances and traditions. No cultural factor has yet been a stumbling block -- not German or Japanese "militarism," not "Asian values," not African "tribalism," not Latin America's alleged fondness for caudillos, not the once-purported preference of eastern Europeans for despotism.

The fact is, few nations begin the democratic journey with a democratic culture. The vast majority create one over time -- through the hard, daily struggle to make good laws, build democratic institutions, tolerate differences, resolve them peacefully, and share power justly. Unfortunately, it is difficult to grow the habits of democracy in the controlled environment of authoritarianism, to have them ready and in place when tyranny is lifted. The process of democratization is likely to be messy and unsatisfactory, but it is absolutely necessary. Democracy, it is said, cannot be imposed, particularly by a foreign power. This is true but beside the point. It is more likely that tyranny has to be imposed.

The story today is rarely one of peoples resisting the basics of democracy -- the right to choose those who will govern them and other basic freedoms. It is, instead, about people choosing democratic leaders and then becoming impatient with them and holding them accountable on their duty to deliver a better life. It is strongly in our national interest to help sustain these leaders, support their countries' democratic institutions, and ensure that their new governments are capable of providing for their own security, especially when their nations have experienced crippling conflicts. To do so will require long-term partnerships rooted in mutual responsibility and the integration of all elements of our national power -- political, diplomatic, economic, and, at times, military. We have recently built such partnerships to great effect with countries as different as Colombia, Lebanon, and Liberia. Indeed, a decade ago, Colombia was on the verge of failure. Today, in part because of our long-term partnership with courageous leaders and citizens, Colombia is emerging as a normal nation, with democratic institutions that are defending the country, governing justly, reducing poverty, and contributing to international security.

We must now build long-term partnerships with other new and fragile democracies, especially Afghanistan. The basics of democracy are taking root in this country after nearly three decades of tyranny, violence, and war. For the first time in their history, Afghans have a government of the people, elected in presidential and parliamentary elections, and guided by a constitution that codifies the rights of all citizens. The challenges in Afghanistan do not stem from a strong enemy. The Taliban offers a political vision that very few Afghans embrace. Rather, they exploit the current limitations of the Afghan government, using violence against civilians and revenues from illegal narcotics to impose their rule. Where the Afghan government, with support from the international community, has been able to provide good governance and economic opportunity, the Taliban is in retreat. The United States and NATO have a vital interest in supporting the emergence of an effective, democratic Afghan state that can defeat the Taliban and deliver "population security" -- addressing basic needs for safety, services, the rule of law, and increased economic opportunity. We share this goal with the Afghan people, who do not want us to leave until we have accomplished our common mission. We can succeed in Afghanistan, but we must be prepared to sustain a partnership with that new democracy for many years to come.

One of our best tools for supporting states in building democratic institutions and strengthening civil society is our foreign assistance, but we must use it correctly. One of the great advances of the past eight years has been the creation of a bipartisan consensus for the more strategic use of foreign assistance. We have begun to transform our assistance into an incentive for developing states to govern justly, advance economic freedom, and invest in their people. This is the great innovation of the Millennium Challenge Account initiative. More broadly, we are now better aligning our foreign aid with our foreign policy goals -- so as to help developing countries move from war to peace, poverty to prosperity, poor governance to democracy and the rule of law. At the same time, we have launched historic efforts to help remove obstacles to democratic development -- by forgiving old debts, feeding the hungry, expanding access to education, and fighting pandemics such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. Behind all of these efforts is the overwhelming generosity of the American people, who since 2001 have supported the near tripling of the United States' official development assistance worldwide -- doubling it for Latin America and quadrupling it for Africa.

Ultimately, one of the best ways to support the growth of democratic institutions and civil society is to expand free and fair trade and investment. The very process of implementing a trade agreement or a bilateral investment treaty helps to hasten and consolidate democratic development. Legal and political institutions that can enforce property rights are better able to protect human rights and the rule of law. Independent courts that can resolve commercial disputes can better resolve civil and political disputes. The transparency needed to fight corporate corruption makes it harder for political corruption to go unnoticed and unpunished. A rising middle class also creates new centers of social power for political movements and parties. Trade is a divisive issue in our country right now, but we must not forget that it is essential not only for the health of our domestic economy but also for the success our foreign policy.

There will always be humanitarian needs, but our goal must be to use the tools of foreign assistance, security cooperation, and trade together to help countries graduate to self-sufficiency. We must insist that these tools be used to promote democratic development. It is in our national interest to do so.

THE CHANGING MIDDLE EAST

What about the broader Middle East, the arc of states that stretches from Morocco to Pakistan? The Bush administration's approach to this region has been its most vivid departure from prior policy. But our approach is, in reality, an extension of traditional tenets -- incorporating human rights and the promotion of democratic development into a policy meant to further our national interest. What is exceptional is that the Middle East was treated as an exception for so many decades. U.S. policy there focused almost exclusively on stability. There was little dialogue, certainly not publicly, about the need for democratic change.

For six decades, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, a basic bargain defined the United States' engagement in the broader Middle East: we supported authoritarian regimes, and they supported our shared interest in regional stability. After September 11, it became increasingly clear that this old bargain had produced false stability. There were virtually no legitimate channels for political expression in the region. But this did not mean that there was no political activity. There was -- in madrasahs and radical mosques. It is no wonder that the best-organized political forces were extremist groups. And it was there, in the shadows, that al Qaeda found the troubled souls to prey on and exploit as its foot soldiers in its millenarian war against the "far enemy."

One response would have been to fight the terrorists without addressing this underlying cause. Perhaps it would have been possible to manage these suppressed tensions for a while. Indeed, the quest for justice and a new equilibrium on which the nations of the broader Middle East are now embarked is very turbulent. But is it really worse than the situation before? Worse than when Lebanon suffered under the boot of Syrian military occupation? Worse than when the self-appointed rulers of the Palestinians personally pocketed the world's generosity and squandered their best chance for a two-state peace? Worse than when the international community imposed sanctions on innocent Iraqis in order to punish the man who tyrannized them, threatened Iraq's neighbors, and bulldozed 300,000 human beings into unmarked mass graves? Or worse than the decades of oppression and denied opportunity that spawned hopelessness, fed hatreds, and led to the sort of radicalization that brought about the ideology behind the September 11 attacks? Far from being the model of stability that some seem to remember, the Middle East from 1945 on was wracked repeatedly by civil conflicts and cross-border wars. Our current course is certainly difficult, but let us not romanticize the old bargains of the Middle East -- for they yielded neither justice nor stability.

The president's second inaugural address and my speech at the American University in Cairo in June 2005 have been held up as rhetorical declarations that have faded in the face of hard realities. No one will argue that the goal of democratization and modernization in the broader Middle East lacks ambition, and we who support it fully acknowledge that it will be a difficult, generational task. No one event, and certainly not a speech, will bring it into being. But if America does not set the goal, no one will.

This goal is made more complicated by the fact that the future of the Middle East is bound up in many of our other vital

interests: energy security, nonproliferation, the defense of friends and allies, the resolution of old conflicts, and, most of all, the need for near-term partners in the global struggle against violent Islamist extremism. To state, however, that we must promote either our security interests or our democratic ideals is to present a false choice. Admittedly, our interests and our ideals do come into tension at times in the short term. America is not an NGO and must balance myriad factors in our relations with all countries. But in the long term, our security is best ensured by the success of our ideals: freedom, human rights, open markets, democracy, and the rule of law.

The leaders and citizens of the broader Middle East are now searching for answers to the fundamental questions of modern state building: What are to be the limits on the state's use of power, both within and beyond its borders? What will be the role of the state in the lives of its citizens and the relationship between religion and politics? How will traditional values and mores be reconciled with the democratic promise of individual rights and liberty, particularly for women and girls? How is religious and ethnic diversity to be accommodated in fragile political institutions when people tend to hold on to traditional associations? The answers to these and other questions can come only from within the Middle East itself. The task for us is to support and shape these difficult processes of change and to help the nations of the region overcome several major challenges to their emergence as modern, democratic states.

The first challenge is the global ideology of violent Islamist extremism, as embodied by groups, such as al Qaeda, that thoroughly reject the basic tenets of modern politics, seeking instead to topple sovereign states, erase national borders, and restore the imperial structure of the ancient caliphate. To resist this threat, the United States will need friends and allies in the region who are willing and able to take action against the terrorists among them. Ultimately, however, this is more than just a struggle of arms; it is a contest of ideas. Al Qaeda's theory of victory is to hijack the legitimate local and national grievances of Muslim societies and twist them into an ideological narrative of endless struggle against Western, especially U.S., oppression. The good news is that al Qaeda's intolerant ideology can be enforced only through brutality and violence. When people are free to choose, as we have seen in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq's Anbar Province, they reject al Qaeda's ideology and rebel against its control. Our theory of victory, therefore, must be to offer people a democratic path to advance their interests peacefully -- to develop their talents, to redress injustices, and to live in freedom and dignity. In this sense, the fight against terrorism is a kind of global counterinsurgency: the center of gravity is not the enemies we fight but the societies they are trying to radicalize.

Admittedly, our interests in both promoting democratic development and fighting terrorism and extremism lead to some hard choices, because we do need capable friends in the broader Middle East who can root out terrorists now. These states are often not democratic, so we must balance the tensions between our short-term and our long-term goals. We cannot deny nondemocratic states the security assistance to fight terrorism or defend themselves. At the same time, we must use other points of leverage to promote democracy and hold our friends to account. That means supporting civil society, as we have done through the Forum for the Future and the Middle East Partnership Initiative, and using public and private diplomacy to push our nondemocratic partners to reform. Changes are slowly coming in terms of universal suffrage, more influential parliaments, and education for girls and women. We must continue to advocate for reform and support indigenous agents of change in nondemocratic countries, even as we cooperate with their governments on security.

An example of how our administration has balanced these concerns is our relationship with Pakistan. Following years of U.S. neglect of that relationship, our administration had to establish a partnership with Pakistan's military government to achieve a common goal after September 11. We did so knowing that our security and that of Pakistan ultimately required a return to civilian and democratic rule. So even as we worked with President Pervez Musharraf to fight terrorists and extremists, we invested more than \$3 billion to strengthen Pakistani society -- building schools and health clinics, providing emergency relief after the 2005 earthquake, and supporting political parties and the rule of law. We urged Pakistan's military leaders to put their country on a modern and moderate trajectory, which in some important respects they did. And when this progress was threatened last year by the declaration of emergency rule, we pushed President Musharraf hard to take off his uniform and hold free elections. Although terrorists tried to thwart the return of democracy and tragically killed many innocent people, including former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, the Pakistani people dealt extremism a crushing defeat at the polls. This restoration of democracy in Pakistan creates an opportunity for us to build the lasting and broad-based partnership that we have never achieved with this nation, thereby enhancing our security and anchoring the success of our values in a troubled region.

A second challenge to the emergence of a better Middle East is posed by aggressive states that seek not to peacefully reform the present regional order but to alter it using any form of violence -- assassination, intimidation, terrorism. The question is not whether any particular state should have influence in the region. They all do, and will. The real question is, What kind of influence will these states wield -- and to what ends, constructive or destructive? It is this fundamental and still unresolved question that is at the center of many of the geopolitical challenges in the Middle East today -- whether it is Syria's undermining of Lebanon's sovereignty, Iran's pursuit of a nuclear capability, or both states' support for terrorism.

Iran poses a particular challenge. The Iranian regime pursues its disruptive policies both through state instruments, such

as the Revolutionary Guards and the al Quds force, and through nonstate proxies that extend Iranian power, such as elements of the Mahdi Army in Iraq, Hamas in Gaza, and Hezbollah in Lebanon and around the world. The Iranian regime seeks to subvert states and extend its influence throughout the Persian Gulf region and the broader Middle East. It threatens the state of Israel with extinction and holds implacable hostility toward the United States. And it is destabilizing Iraq, endangering U.S. forces, and killing innocent Iraqis. The United States is responding to these provocations. Clearly, an Iran with a nuclear weapon or even the technology to build one on demand would be a grave threat to international peace and security.

But there is also another Iran. It is the land of a great culture and a great people, who suffer under repression. The Iranian people deserve to be integrated into the international system, to travel freely and be educated in the best universities. Indeed, the United States has reached out to them with exchanges of sports teams, disaster-relief workers, and artists. By many accounts, the Iranian people are favorably disposed to Americans and to the United States. Our relationship could be different. Should the Iranian government honor the UN Security Council's demands and suspend its uranium enrichment and related activities, the community of nations, including the United States, is prepared to discuss the full range of issues before us. The United States has no permanent enemies.

Ultimately, the many threats that Iran poses must be seen in a broader context: that of a state fundamentally out of step with the norms and values of the international community. Iran must make a strategic choice -- a choice that we have sought to clarify with our approach -- about how and to what ends it will wield its power and influence: Does it want to continue thwarting the legitimate demands of the world, advancing its interests through violence, and deepening the isolation of its people? Or is it open to a better relationship, one of growing trade and exchange, deepening integration, and peaceful cooperation with its neighbors and the broader international community? Tehran should know that changes in its behavior would meet with changes in ours. But Iran should also know that the United States will defend its friends and its interests vigorously until the day that change comes.

A third challenge is finding a way to resolve long-standing conflicts, particularly that between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Our administration has put the idea of democratic development at the center of our approach to this conflict, because we came to believe that the Israelis will not achieve the security they deserve in their Jewish state and the Palestinians will not achieve the better life they deserve in a state of their own until there is a Palestinian government capable of exercising its sovereign responsibilities, both to its citizens and to its neighbors. Ultimately, a Palestinian state must be created that can live side by side with Israel in peace and security. This state will be born not just through negotiations to resolve hard issues related to borders, refugees, and the status of Jerusalem but also through the difficult effort to build effective democratic institutions that can fight terrorism and extremism, enforce the rule of law, combat corruption, and create opportunities for the Palestinians to improve their lives. This confers responsibilities on both parties.

As the experience of the past several years has shown, there is a fundamental disagreement at the heart of Palestinian society -- between those who reject violence and recognize Israel's right to exist and those who do not. The Palestinian people must ultimately make a choice about which future they desire, and it is only democracy that gives them that choice and holds open the possibility of a peaceful way forward to resolve the existential question at the heart of their national life. The United States, Israel, other states in the region, and the international community must do everything in their power to support those Palestinians who would choose a future of peace and compromise. When the two-state solution is finally realized, it will be because of democracy, not despite it.

This is, indeed, a controversial view, and it speaks to one more challenge that must be resolved if democratic and modern states are to emerge in the broader Middle East: how to deal with nonstate groups whose commitment to democracy, nonviolence, and the rule of law is suspect. Because of the long history of authoritarianism in the region, many of the best-organized political parties are Islamist, and some of them have not renounced violence used in the service of political goals. What should be their role in the democratic process? Will they take power democratically only to subvert the very process that brought them victory? Are elections in the broader Middle East therefore dangerous?

These questions are not easy. When Hamas won elections in the Palestinian territories, it was widely seen as a failure of policy. But although this victory most certainly complicated affairs in the broader Middle East, in another way it helped to clarify matters. Hamas had significant power before those elections -- largely the power to destroy. After the elections, Hamas also had to face real accountability for its use of power for the first time. This has enabled the Palestinian people, and the international community, to hold Hamas to the same basic standards of responsibility to which all governments should be held. Through its continued unwillingness to behave like a responsible regime rather than a violent movement, Hamas has demonstrated that it is wholly incapable of governing.

Much attention has been focused on Gaza, which Hamas holds hostage to its incompetent and brutal policies. But in other places, the Palestinians have held Hamas accountable. In the West Bank city of Qalqilya, for instance, where Hamas was

elected in 2004, frustrated and fed-up Palestinians voted it out of office in the next election. If there can be a legitimate, effective, and democratic alternative to Hamas (something that Fatah has not yet been), people will likely choose it. This would especially be true if the Palestinians could live a normal life within their own state.

The participation of armed groups in elections is problematic. But the lesson is not that there should not be elections. Rather, there should be standards, like the ones to which the international community has held Hamas after the fact: you can be a terrorist group or you can be a political party, but you cannot be both. As difficult as this problem is, it cannot be the case that people are denied the right to vote just because the outcome might be unpleasant to us. Although we cannot know whether politics will ultimately deradicalize violent groups, we do know that excluding them from the political process grants them power without responsibility. This is yet another challenge that the leaders and the peoples of the broader Middle East must resolve as the region turns to democratic processes and institutions to resolve differences peacefully and without repression.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF IRAQ

Then, of course, there is Iraq, which is perhaps the toughest test of the proposition that democracy can overcome deep divisions and differences. Because Iraq is a microcosm of the region, with its layers of ethnic and sectarian diversity, the Iraqi people's struggle to build a democracy after the fall of Saddam Hussein is shifting the landscape not just of Iraq but of the broader Middle East as well.

The cost of this war, in lives and treasure, for Americans and Iraqis, has been greater than we ever imagined. This story is still being written, and will be for many years to come. Sanctions and weapons inspections, prewar intelligence and diplomacy, troop levels and postwar planning -- these are all important issues that historians will analyze for decades. But the fundamental question that we can ask and debate now is, Was removing Saddam from power the right decision? I continue to believe that it was.

After we fought one war against Saddam and then remained in a formal state of hostilities with him for over a decade, our containment policy began to erode. The community of nations was losing its will to enforce containment, and Iraq's ruler was getting increasingly good at exploiting it through programs such as oil-for-food -- indeed, more than we knew at the time. The failure of containment was increasingly evident in the UN Security Council resolutions that were passed and then violated, in our regular clashes in the no-fly zones, and in President Bill Clinton's decision to launch air strikes in 1998 and then join with Congress to make "regime change" our government's official policy in Iraq. If Saddam was not a threat, why did the community of nations keep the Iraqi people under the most brutal sanctions in modern history? In fact, as the Iraq Survey Group showed, Saddam was ready and willing to reconstitute his weapons of mass destruction programs as soon as international pressure had dissipated.

The United States did not overthrow Saddam to democratize the Middle East. It did so to remove a long-standing threat to international security. But the administration was conscious of the goal of democratization in the aftermath of liberation. We discussed the question of whether we should be satisfied with the end of Saddam's rule and the rise of another strongman to replace him. The answer was no, and it was thus avowedly U.S. policy from the outset to try to support the Iraqis in building a democratic Iraq. It is important to remember that we did not overthrow Adolf Hitler to bring democracy to Germany either. But the United States believed that only a democratic Germany could ultimately anchor a lasting peace in Europe.

The democratization of Iraq and the democratization of the Middle East were thus linked. So, too, was the war on terror linked to Iraq, because our goal after September 11 was to address the deeper malignancies of the Middle East, not just the symptoms of them. It is very hard to imagine how a more just and democratic Middle East could ever have emerged with Saddam still at the center of the region.

Our effort in Iraq has been extremely arduous. Iraq was a broken state and a broken society under Saddam. We have made mistakes. That is undeniable. The explosion to the surface of long-suppressed grievances has challenged fragile, young democratic institutions. But there is no other decent and peaceful way for the Iraqis to reconcile.

As Iraq emerges from its difficulties, the impact of its transformation is being felt in the rest of the region. Ultimately, the states of the Middle East need to reform. But they need to reform their relations, too. A strategic realignment is unfolding in the broader Middle East, separating those states that are responsible and accept that the time for violence under the rubric of "resistance" has passed and those that continue to fuel extremism, terrorism, and chaos. Support for moderate Palestinians and a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for democratic leaders and citizens in Lebanon have focused the energies of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the states of the Persian Gulf. They must come to see that a democratic Iraq can be an ally in resisting extremism in the region. When they invited Iraq to join the ranks of the Gulf Cooperation Council-Plus-Two (Egypt and Jordan), they took an important step in that direction.

At the same time, these countries look to the United States to stay deeply involved in their troubled region and to counter and deter threats from Iran. The United States now has the weight of its effort very much in the center of the broader Middle East. Our long-term partnerships with Afghanistan and Iraq, to which we must remain deeply committed, our new relationships in Central Asia, and our long-standing partnerships in the Persian Gulf provide a solid geostrategic foundation for the generational work ahead of helping to bring about a better, more democratic, and more prosperous Middle East.

A UNIQUELY AMERICAN REALISM

Investing in strong and rising powers as stakeholders in the international order and supporting the democratic development of weak and poorly governed states -- these broad goals for U.S. foreign policy are certainly ambitious, and they raise an obvious question: Is the United States up to the challenge, or, as some fear and assert these days, is the United States a nation in decline?

We should be confident that the foundation of American power is and will remain strong -- for its source is the dynamism, vigor, and resilience of American society. The United States still possesses the unique ability to assimilate new citizens of every race, religion, and culture into the fabric of our national and economic life. The same values that lead to success in the United States also lead to success in the world: industriousness, innovation, entrepreneurialism. All of these positive habits, and more, are reinforced by our system of education, which leads the world in teaching children not what to think but how to think -- how to address problems critically and solve them creatively.

Indeed, one challenge to the national interest is to make certain that we can provide quality education to all, especially disadvantaged children. The American ideal is one of equal opportunity, not equal outcome. This is the glue that holds together our multiethnic democracy. If we ever stop believing that what matters is not where you came from but where you are going, we will most certainly lose confidence. And an unconfident America cannot lead. We will turn inward. We will see economic competition, foreign trade and investment, and the complicated world beyond our shores not as challenges to which our nation can rise but as threats that we should avoid. That is why access to education is a critical national security issue.

We should also be confident that the foundations of the United States' economic power are strong, and will remain so. Even amid financial turbulence and international crises, the U.S. economy has grown more and faster since 2001 than the economy of any other leading industrial nation. The United States remains unquestionably the engine of global economic growth. To remain so, we must find new, more reliable, and more environmentally friendly sources of energy. The industries of the future are in the high-tech fields (including in clean energy), which our nation has led for years and in which we remain on the global cutting edge. Other nations are indeed experiencing amazing and welcome economic growth, but the United States will likely account for the largest share of global GDP for decades to come.

Even in our government institutions of national security, the foundations of U.S. power are stronger than many assume. Despite our waging two wars and rising to defend ourselves in a new global confrontation, U.S. defense spending today as a percentage of GDP is still well below the average during the Cold War. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have indeed put an enormous strain on our military, and President Bush has proposed to Congress an expansion of our force by 65,000 soldiers and 27,000 marines. The experience of recent years has tested our armed forces, but it has also prepared a new generation of military leaders for stabilization and counterinsurgency missions, of which we will likely face more. This experience has also reinforced the urgent need for a new kind of partnership between our military and civilian institutions. Necessity is the mother of invention, and the provincial reconstruction teams that we deploy in Afghanistan and Iraq are a model of civil-military cooperation for the future.

In these pages in 2000, I decried the role of the United States, in particular the U.S. military, in nation building. In 2008, it is absolutely clear that we will be involved in nation building for years to come. But it should not be the U.S. military that has to do it. Nor should it be a mission that we take up only after states fail. Rather, civilian institutions such as the new Civilian Response Corps must lead diplomats and development workers in a whole-of-government approach to our national security challenges. We must help weak and poorly functioning states strengthen and reform themselves and thereby prevent their failure in the first place. This will require the transformation and better integration of the United States' institutions of hard power and soft power -- a difficult task and one that our administration has begun. Since 2001, the president has requested and Congress has approved a nearly 54 percent increase in funding for our institutions of diplomacy and development. And this year, the president and I asked Congress to create 1,100 new positions for the State Department and 300 new positions for the U.S. Agency for International Development. Those who follow us must build on this foundation.

Perhaps of greater concern is not that the United States lacks the capacity for global leadership but that it lacks the will. We Americans engage in foreign policy because we have to, not because we want to, and this is a healthy disposition -- it is that of a republic, not an empire. There have been times in the past eight years when we have had to do new and difficult

things -- things that, at times, have tested the resolve and the patience of the American people. Our actions have not always been popular, or even well understood. The exigencies of September 12 and beyond may now seem very far away. But the actions of the United States will for many, many years be driven by the knowledge that we are in an unfair fight: we need to be right one hundred percent of the time; the terrorists, only once. Yet I find that whatever differences we and our allies have had over the last eight years, they still want a confident and engaged United States, because there are few problems in the world that can be resolved without us. We need to recognize that, too.

Ultimately, however, what will most determine whether the United States can succeed in the twenty-first century is our imagination. It is this feature of the American character that most accounts for our unique role in the world, and it stems from the way that we think about our power and our values. The old dichotomy between realism and idealism has never really applied to the United States, because we do not really accept that our national interest and our universal ideals are at odds. For our nation, it has always been a matter of perspective. Even when our interests and ideals come into tension in the short run, we believe that in the long run they are indivisible.

This has freed America to imagine that the world can always be better -- not perfect, but better -- than others have consistently thought possible. America imagined that a democratic Germany might one day be the anchor of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. America believed that a democratic Japan might one day be a source of peace in an increasingly free and prosperous Asia. America kept faith with the people of the Baltics that they would be independent and thus brought the day when NATO held a summit in Riga, Latvia. To realize these and other ambitious goals that we have imagined, America has often preferred preponderances of power that favor our values over balances of power that do not. We have dealt with the world as it is, but we have never accepted that we are powerless to change the world. Indeed, we have shown that by marrying American power and American values, we could help friends and allies expand the boundaries of what most thought realistic at the time.

How to describe this disposition of ours? It is realism, of a sort. But it is more than that -- what I have called our uniquely American realism. This makes us an incredibly impatient nation. We live in the future, not the past. We do not linger over our own history. This has led our nation to make mistakes in the past, and we will surely make more in the future. Still, it is our impatience to improve less-than-ideal situations and to accelerate the pace of change that leads to our most enduring achievements, at home and abroad.

At the same time, ironically, our uniquely American realism also makes us deeply patient. We understand how long and trying the course of democracy is. We acknowledge our birth defect, a constitution founded on a compromise that reduced my ancestors each to three-fifths of a man. Yet we are healing old wounds and living as one American people, and this shapes our engagement with the world. We support democracy not because we think ourselves perfect but because we know ourselves to be deeply imperfect. This gives us reason to be humble in our own endeavors and patient with the endeavors of others. We know that today's headlines are rarely the same as history's judgments.

An international order that reflects our values is the best guarantee of our enduring national interest, and America continues to have a unique opportunity to shape this outcome. Indeed, we already see glimpses of this better world. We see it in Kuwaiti women gaining the right to vote, in a provincial council meeting in Kirkuk, and in the improbable sight of the American president standing with democratically elected leaders in front of the flags of Afghanistan, Iraq, and the future state of Palestine. Shaping that world will be the work of a generation, but we have done such work before. And if we remain confident in the power of our values, we can succeed in such work again.

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