

**WASHINGTON'S CHOICE AND OURS:
RETHINKING AMERICA'S 21ST CENTURY NATIONAL SECURITY CHOICES**

**OPENING REMARKS BY
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COUNCIL AND THE ARCHITECTS OF AMERICAN POWER"**

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Sixty years ago, in the wake of the most destructive war in the history of mankind and facing the prospect of future wars in which nuclear weapons could produce even more devastating consequences, the leaders of the world's sole superpower sought to reinvent their government and the international community to preserve the peace. The costs of past failures were fresh in their minds. The potential costs of their own failure were unimaginable.

The result was a period of unmatched institutional creativity and one that would reveal and define the character not only of a new era but of the nation that would dominate that era.

Within just two years, the U.S. government led the creation of a number of international institutions, including the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the forebear of the World Trade Organization, the International Labor Organization and NATO. We rebuilt Europe through the unprecedented if carefully calculated generosity of the Marshall Plan, did the same for our former enemy in Japan and began a program of foreign aid that fostered hope among many of the neediest nations of the free world. And, here at home, within the national security structure of the U.S. government, America's leaders created the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Air Force and the National Security Council.

These domestic organizations were designed to implement lessons learned during the waging of the Second World War, particularly those associated with the problems of a government that often was at odds with itself, not attentively managed from the top, and not oriented toward a

role of on-going global engagement. The international organizations and initiatives were conceived to create a stronger, more effective international community than the ill-fated attempt at the League of Nations had done two decades before and aid initiatives sought to avoid penalizing losers or failing to consolidate gains as had happened in the wake of World War I.

At home, it was recognized that with our wartime allies the Soviets emerging as potential rivals and a new kind of total war a real possibility, that new mechanisms of command and control, intelligence gathering, and inter-agency coordination were critically needed. Internationally, it was recognized that only through creating the kind of institutional and legal structures that had offered just dispute settlements within our own societies and thus obviated the need for armed conflict could lasting peace be achieved—that systems of justice were the only way to trump impulses toward war.

Of central importance was the recognition among an American political elite that had historically been deeply isolationist that we no longer had the option of disengaging ourselves from global affairs. We were indisputably the world's most powerful nation, with virtually every other great power devastated by war, our Axis enemies utterly defeated, our allies essentially depleted. But instead of choosing to impose our will on the planet or to use our victory as an opportunity to create a new global empire, as virtually every precedent of history would have suggested, we determined to choose another course, to reinvest our political capital in an international system of laws and to reinvest our financial resources in rebuilding even our enemies to ensure that the promise of the future was sufficient to divert global attentions toward prosperity and stability and away from further battles.

It was an example that harkened back to the earliest days of the American republic, when the one great leader who had emerged triumphant and unrivaled, George Washington, chose not to be a king or to assume great personal powers onto himself or his family but instead determined to reinvest his personal political capital into the institutions of government and law that he had fought to create. It was a personal choice that gave American democracy a chance it would not otherwise have had and it has had repercussions that have touched billions.

A half century after echoing Washington's choice in the late 40s, we faced it again, at a time when once again we were the sole superpower standing, when we were once again called upon by the world to lead. For a while, it looked as though we might act consistent with the traditions of what Tom Brokaw has called "the greatest generation." And then, in the wake of the brutal attacks of 9/11, we reconsidered our position and chose a far different course.

As in the post-Cold War years, we entered a period of considerable institutional creativity, especially in terms of our institutions of national security...which have been, since 2001, reinvented more sweepingly than at any time since those days after our victories in Europe and Japan six decades ago. But the question we need to ask ourselves is: are our decisions living up to the principles or revealing the kind of wisdom and foresight that were so evident in the era of Truman, Marshall, Acheson, Forrestal, Clifford and their colleagues? And if they are not or if they are wanting in some way, what should we do promote further evolution in our national security apparatus and the approaches it pursues? Answering those questions is the purpose of this event and was something I sought to answer as well as I worked on my book on how the NSC rose to become what is unquestionably the most powerful committee in the history of the world.

The institutional creativity of the post-Cold War era began in the last years of the Cold War era. During the first Bush Administration, as policymakers contemplated what Brent Scowcroft then called "the new world order", we created a grand ad hoc coalition of the willing, including most European and Arab nations, to rebuff Saddam Hussein's efforts to annex Kuwait. We helped clear the way for the reunification of Germany and began processes that led to the Clinton Era push to expand our NATO alliance among the countries of what had been the Warsaw Pact and to augment that community further within the former Soviet Union via the Partnership for Peace. Also, during the Clinton years, not only did NAFTA become a reality as did the WTO, but within the U.S. government, a National Economic Council was created as a counterpart to the NSC to ensure the elevation of economic issues to centrality within American international (as well as domestic) priorities..

The picture was not however, entirely one of ascendant multilateralism and a move beyond international relationships defined primarily by security-related considerations. Because also during the Clinton years, the U.S. (for carefully framed reasons) stepped back from participating in initiatives that might strengthen the international system such as ratification of the Chemical Weapons Treaty and the anti-landmine agreement. This sometimes hesitant internationalism was then made even more hesitant—reluctant even--with the arrival of the Bush 43 Administration.

The Administration's initial impulses internationally could be, and in fact were characterized as neo-isolationism, a desire to pull back from all seemingly unnecessary involvement in global affairs and a pronounced skepticism about Clinton Era policies of every stripe including, especially, multilateralism. Then came September 11, 2001.

That moment crystallized in the eyes of Administration policymakers and many Americans the new threats America faced and the new nature of the global environment, the “new” new world order if you will. (Or given the re-entry of Saddam into the picture shortly afterwards, a revisiting of the old new world order.)

As a consequence the U.S. leadership announced a fundamental change in national security orientation, and began to organize U.S. foreign policy to counter a new enemy much as Cold War policy had been organized around containing the Soviet threat. The entire U.S. national security apparatus was redirected in response to this new global threat and the perceived failings 9/11 had exposed in our previous structures and approaches. In the past four years, we created the first major new security agency of the U.S. government since the post-Cold War years with the launch of the Department of Homeland Security. The intelligence community also saw its biggest reorganization since those immediately post-OSS days with the creation of the Director of National Intelligence position. Simultaneously, the transformation of Defense assets became focused upon combating terror, the links between our law enforcement and intelligence agencies were strengthened, new counter-terrorism agencies were established and a global coalition in support of eliminating terror financing and trafficking in weapons of mass destruction was extended and strengthened. At the same time, the National Economic Council diminished

hugely in influence and the elevation of economic issues and agencies seen during the brief post-Cold War, pre-9/11 period was reversed.

Just as importantly, the U.S. undertook to wage its new war in a way that sought new allies and when the Bush Administration found few, they determined to proceed not only without them but in the face of international opinion and processes. Further damaging their international standing, the Bush team shored up its arguments not with a strategic imperative or precedent but with rationales and arguments that would be found to have no empirical basis. We acted not just alone, but in a way that weakened already weak international institutions and undercut American legitimacy as the principal advocate for an international community motivated by common interests and guided by laws.

Neither the institutional decisions we made nor the institutions we have created seem likely to withstand the test of decades as well as those produced in the late forties for several reasons. One, in the forties, we identified a genuinely great emerging threat, global communism. It, combined with the likely acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by the Soviets and their allies, made the threat one to the very survival of humanity. Our current seeming equation of the threat posed by a few thousand mostly impoverished, resource-constrained fugitives to that of an industrial superpower armed with tens of thousands of nuclear warheads and the ability to deliver them to any spot in America within minutes is problematic to say the least. Terrorism is not an enemy, as Zbigniew Brzezinski has pointed out, it is a tactic. The enemies we face, while worthy of taking seriously, are not worthy of serving as even the nucleus of an organizing principle for our foreign policy. Greater threats exist that are apparent and no doubt some exist that are less apparent. The growing indebtedness of the U.S. and our dependency on foreign investors who have very different national interests from our own, the rise of some of those investor powers and their relative appeal to billions on a planet that feels that we are running “globalization” as some kind of private profit-making scheme for America and a few friends, even the desire of some emerging powers to gain technological and military strength and to reassert themselves regionally and perhaps globally, all of these are far greater in import than the threat posed by Al Qaeda or all the major terror groups of the world added together. In short, there are more suitable, more urgently needed organizing principles for our post-Cold War

foreign policy out there and we have yet to identify them in a way that resonates with both foreign policy elites and the American people.

Further, organizing to contain communism was an appropriate response, sending a message that we would not tolerate its advance as being critical to ultimately isolating and then defeating this malevolent force. However, creating a massive society-transforming response to terrorism does not necessarily do anything to deter terror, rather it will simply force a change in terrorists' tactics while at the same time giving them the psychological victories that are the only ones they are capable of winning.

Of course, it should also go without saying that consolidating existing government departments into a new bureaucracy is hardly the way to enhance the effectiveness of already sluggish agencies especially when the real challenges to the success of those agencies come from deep-seated cultural impediments to inter-agency cooperation, to the adoption of effective tactics, and to changes within the structures that really matter—the appropriating and authorization committees of the United States Congress.

Finally, it is clear that we have once again faced Washington's choice—whether to use unequalled power in the narrow self-interest of the one (person or nation) holding the power or whether to reinvest it into a system of institutions and laws to which we will actually submit in order to ensure that justice is able to do its work as the most effective of all peacekeepers—and it is equally clear that this time made a decision very much unlike that of Washington and Truman. We have asserted that rather than create effective international institutions or abide by the laws we have made internationally or the principles to which we have historically adhered, we instead choose to take justice into our own hands, use whatever means necessary to do so and ask the world to trust in our good intentions and our assessment of what costs are necessary to achieve the goals we assert are worthy.

This is a dangerous choice. Moral arguments aside, it is one which is corrosive to virtually all of the institutions and ideas which the United States, at a moment when we believed we stood

between the most brutal conflagration that mankind had ever seen and something even worse, believed were our only salvation.

Naturally, the great strength of the American system is its ability to perfect itself, to change when change is necessary. The National Security Act of 1947 was not really practicable until amended in 1949 and important adjustments in it have continued over the years, notably those implemented with Goldwater-Nichols in the 1980s. As we come to recognize the terrorism is but one of a range of significant threats we face, that bureaucratic changes are inadequate without technological, cultural and legislative fine-tuning to come or without a consensus on the kind of overarching principles that should shape our approaches to the world in the 21st Century....as we see that the only way we can restore the vitality and effectiveness of the international system is by investing it with the political and financial capital of its most powerful player...as we grow to recognize that the new challenges we face require that we restore the fledgling idea from the 90s that economics and security were indivisible, opposite sides of the same coin...then perhaps we may also come to realize the wisdom of great leaders of the past, and once again advance the important agenda of devising a national security system that is not only suited to protecting America but that recognizes that to do so, that it is in our vital national interest to ensure the peace and prosperity of our neighbors around the world as well.

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Ambassador