The New Protracted Conflict
Finding a Foreign Policy

by Harvey Sicherman

The events of September 11, 2001, transformed George W. Bush’s presidency and with it American foreign policy. Within weeks, the president and Secretary of State Colin Powell organized an international coalition to wage war on “a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them.” Powell also began the pursuit of new opportunities in U.S. relations with Russia, the Arab–Israeli conflict, and South Asian affairs. All of this was in dramatic contrast to Washington’s slow start earlier in the year.

The Bush administration had found a foreign policy, one that sought not only to facilitate the war but also to change vital international relationships in the process. This marked both a sudden coming of age for the inexperienced president and broad American recognition that the post-Cold War era had ended. There was a new war to be won and a new peace to be secured.

A Halting Start

In early September Time magazine published a full-scale review of the Bush foreign policy that summarized a mounting litany of woes both at home and abroad. The administration was charged with “unilateralism,” an arrogant tendency to ignore even its allies after years of laborious international effort on such conventions as the Kyoto Protocol on global warming. Bush’s threat to withdraw from the ABM treaty was another oft-cited offense. Powell, the would-be multilateralist, was often cast in the Washington rumor mill against the Pentagon hawks, who seemingly had the President’s ear.

1 President’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, Sept. 20, 2001.
2 Fuller particulars may be found in Michla Pomerance, “U.S. Multilateralism, Left and Right,” in this issue of Orbis.

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This was a surprising turn of events for an administration that seemed to have foreign policy in its genes. Powell, Vice President Richard Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice knew how to work the national security machine. Moreover, during the campaign, Bush himself had surfaced a carefully thought out approach that united the Republican Party while simultaneously attacking the Clinton legacy.

He wanted a change of tone (“We’ve got to be humble . . .”) from Clinton’s preachiness, promised to stay clear of humanitarian intervention, derided “nation-building” and described China, Clinton’s putative strategic partner, as a strategic rival. At the top of his priorities was the building of a missile defense, ABM treaty or no. He promised a major increase in military spending, a defense reform plan, and more money for the State Department. Finally, Bush offered a new slogan, “a distinctly American internationalism,” that combined a Reaganesque rhetoric about American values with his father’s cautionary pragmatism. Yet by fall 2001, neither the president nor the secretary of state had delivered a general foreign policy speech sketching out goals and plans, unlike virtually all their predecessors except for Clinton.

What happened? The slow start could be attributed in part to the election itself, only settled by the Supreme Court in mid-December 2000. Bush decided to concentrate on a fast domestic program, hoping to establish his political authority. But the administration also made a major mistake, called “policy reviews.” This seemed a good idea: new policies would be developed carefully in consultation with the government’s experts in State, the Pentagon and the CIA. But similar reviews had been attempted in 1989, under the elder Bush, and proved to be a huge waste of irreplaceable “honeymoon” time, leaving the impression that the new team did not know what to do. Eleven years later, the same process again choked the system with confusion, timidity and delay, a quicksand that swallowed “a distinctly American internationalism” without a trace. The situation was compounded by slow moving congressional confirmation of new officials.

**Bush the Anti-Clinton**

Lacking articulation, the foreign policy team made do with the obvious: Bush would not be Clinton. This immediately upset two diplomatic efforts that had been exceptionally demanding of presidential effort. One was Korea; Bush’s abrupt withdrawal from Clinton’s personal diplomacy on that issue left both the South Korean president and Powell to catch up. Another was the Arab–Israeli conflict. Bush apparently believed that Clinton’s patronage of Arafat, the most frequent foreign visitor to the White House,

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had been wasted on a man who, in the end, was unprepared to make peace with Israel on reasonable terms. Arafat would have to earn any future visit by living up to his promises, especially the promise to stop violence.

The Middle East situation in general angered the new team. Powell’s early visit to the region confirmed that the coalition against Saddam Hussein was barely breathing. His effort to create “smart sanctions” that would harm Saddam’s military effort more than the Iraqi civilian population fell afoul of Russian opposition in the UN Security Council. And by July, Washington also knew that neither the Mitchell plan to restore Israeli–Palestinian confidence nor the Tenet plan to secure a cease-fire would take hold in the face of Arafat’s refusal to end the war and a broad-based Israeli refusal to reward him politically for ending it. By late summer, under increasing Arab, especially Saudi, pressure to “do something,” State began to work on a speech for Powell that would somehow change the situation.

The administration’s handling of various multilateral agreements signed by Clinton but never sent to the Senate also carried self-inflicted wounds. When Bush declared a withdrawal from renegotiation of the Kyoto Protocol, he said it was not in U.S. interests but did not offer an alternative, nor did he remind everyone that the U.S. Senate had gone on record opposing it in 1997 by a vote of 95–0. Domestic opposition quickly came alive with a new theme: one could oppose Bush’s “unilateralism” without having to explain the inconveniences of Clinton’s faux multilateralism. Anti-American resentment abroad crystallized when America’s European allies voted with others to deny the United States a seat on the UN Human Rights Commission for the first time.

Bush and Powell spent spring and early summer 2001 on missions of reassurance, especially in Europe, where “third-way,” left-of-center governments were completely unfamiliar with the new president and inclined to think the worst. By mid-June, the United States had turned a quick corner. Bush delivered a major, far-reaching speech in Warsaw that committed the administration to both NATO expansion and a new deal with Russia. Just as important, Powell put an end to talk about leaving the Balkans. When Kosovo-based guerrillas nearly undid the delicately balanced neighboring state of Macedonia, the United States led the NATO rescue. Powell crisply summarized Washington’s policy: “We went in together and we’ll come out together.” But this was alliance politics rather than a reborn commitment to humanitarian intervention or the much-derided nation-building.

Bush’s willingness to sustain major relationships, albeit on altered terms, emerged clearly in two cases. One was with China, which survived an early spy plane crisis in April 2001. Beijing’s behavior struck the White House as arrogant and mendacious. After a painful presidential apology to secure the American crew’s release, Bush riposted with an arms sale to Taiwan and declared he would do “whatever it takes” to defend the island against a PRC attack. But the supposed victory of the Yellow Peril crowd thought to inhabit
the Pentagon’s upper levels proved short-lived when the president repeated
the “one China” formula, opposed to Taiwan’s independence, thereby
reaffirming the historic policy begun by Richard Nixon of engaging China.
The independence-leaned president of Taiwan, Chen Shui-bian, kept low
and quiet throughout the drama, thereby helping to ease the crisis. By spring,
no more was heard of strategic rivals in China or elsewhere and both sides
wanted to put the incident behind them.

**Russian Surprise**

The second case was Vladimir Putin’s Russia, which hotly opposed
Bush’s highest military priority—missile defense. Here, the confluence of
interests and personalities produced a major surprise. Administration and
allied conflicts set the stage. State and Defense quarreled over how much
diplomatic crockery should be smashed to launch a broad-scale testing
program but both were agreed that negotiations could not be allowed to
impede the program indefinitely. The Europeans wondered whether the
technology would work and warned against courting a crisis with Moscow
over such an unproven and radical change.

The Bush–Putin summit meeting of June 16, 2001, brought together
the anti-Clinton with the anti-Yeltsin. Putin offered tight discipline, formal
manners and a sober disposition. He was not afraid to tell his people that they
and their state were in deep trouble and he argued that a stronger central
government was the key to law, order, dignity, and hope. Putin’s maneuvers
might not have amounted to much if not for the sudden increase of oil prices
that occurred shortly after his accession. Moscow now had resources to ease
its economic and political distress.

Somehow the gregarious Bush and reticent Putin hit it off. The
president’s account of this meeting, including his excursion into the soul of
the former KGB operative, alarmed the still potent anti-Russian wing of the
Republican Party. But Putin was good news for Bush. The Russian leader
heard out the ABM arguments and was inclined to look for ways to
cooperate. Bush clearly felt that he could “make history” with Putin. Still, as
of September 11, that history remained to be made.

No review of the pre-war Bush foreign policy would be complete
without mention of the region dearest to the president’s heart: the Americas.
George W., like Ronald Reagan, had been governor of a state bordering
Mexico with a large number of Hispanic immigrants and economic ties well
south of the Rio Grande. Following Reagan’s precedent, Bush took early
initiatives with Mexico and sought to tie it together with Canada as a prelude
to relaunching a hemisphere-wide free trade zone. But this also opened
another front with both the Democrats, whose union constituency hated
NAFTA, and anti-immigration Republicans.
In sum, the Bush administration had gone the better part of its first year without defining its overall foreign policy and found itself on the defensive at home and abroad. There were various regional initiatives: the European relationship had been patched, a start made with Russia, a promise in the Americas, a recovery with China. But Middle East plans were barren of result, and little had been achieved elsewhere. Less unilateral than claimed but bereft of articulation, the Bush administration had begun slowly and was now bogged down.

“**We have Found our Mission**”

All of this changed on September 11, when over 3,000 Americans and others were killed in coordinated attacks on New York and Washington. The United States quickly established that the massacres were the work of suicides from Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda organization.

Al Qaeda had attacked American targets at least twice before, killing several hundred people in coordinated bombings of U.S. embassies in East Africa and nearly sinking the **USS Cole** in Aden Harbor. Osama had been the target of an erratic undercover war by the Clinton administration, including a failed attempt to kill him through a cruise missile attack on a camp in Afghanistan.4

The terrorists clearly hoped to draw upon the persistent resentment by many Muslims and most Arabs of continued American domination: U.S. military protecting the holy land in Saudi Arabia, the sanctions supposedly killing children in Iraq, the perennial offense of supporting Israel, and the immoral allures of an indulgent consumer culture.

While bin Laden’s agents had exploited weaknesses in U.S. intelligence and airport security, the American reaction revealed the Bush administration at its strength. September 11 concentrated the minds of the president and his people remarkably. Within two weeks they had listed war objectives, specified means including the use of military force to achieve them, and declared a timetable: Afghanistan and bin Laden in the first phase, other organizations and countries thereafter. The key elements of this strategy were:

1. **Terrorism was the target.** The use of terrorism, defined as deliberate targeting of civilians, would mark the enemy, *not* ideology or religion.

2. **Terrorism was international, not only transnational.** Terrorists would be linked to specific states who aided or employed them. No longer would the issue be approached as a crime without a foreign address.

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(3) *The front was everywhere.* Not only foreign but domestic policy was involved, including immigration issues, financial controls and civil liberties long taken for granted.

(4) *Strategic choices would be forced.* States antagonistic to the United States or even those on the terrorism list would be allowed to switch sides if they forswore their previous policies and “paid the dues,” a sliding scale of contributions to the war effort as specified by Washington.

This approach allowed many states to participate in a “revolving coalition” through domestic security measures, diplomatic activity, and intelligence-sharing while the United States retained freedom of military action. There were, of course, several candidates deserving of such action. 

At the war council held at Camp David September 14–16 the president himself decided not to make Iraq the first target, for both political and military reasons. He accepted Powell’s argument that unless Saddam’s complicity in September 11 could be proved, the United States had to deal with Osama first or fracture the coalition, weakening American military access that in any event could not immediately be brought to bear decisively on Iraq.

An international coalition formed quickly, led by U.S. allies, especially Britain’s Tony Blair. NATO invoked the mutual defense clause of the Treaty for the first time ever within two days of the attack. Soon NATO aircraft were helping to patrol U.S. airspace, also without precedent. Whatever their earlier views of Bush, most Europeans (and their leaders) rallied behind the Americans. Most were also angered to learn that Al Qaeda operated effectively from major European capitals; the front was in Europe, too.

When Bush declared “we have found our mission” he was also announcing that he knew what he wanted to do in the world, setting the priorities and, in effect, giving the administration marching orders. For administration veterans of the Cold War and Gulf War, this was a familiar drill at which they had excelled in the past and would do so again. Within a hundred days every one of bin Laden’s expectations had proven false. The U.S. military reached to the remote fastness of Afghanistan, crushing both the Taliban regime and Al Qaeda’s forces with minuscule American losses. There was no uprising of a united Islam or collapse of the House of Saud or any other U.S. ally. America’s status as the sole superpower was stunningly confirmed for all the world to see.

**Strategic Choices: Pakistan and South Asia**

The Europeans were helpful, but they were not the key to the Afghan campaign. That required the urgent consent of the neighbors: Russia (of

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which more later), Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and China all had intense quarrels with the Taliban regime, whose only friend was Pakistan, an erstwhile U.S. ally fallen on very hard times.

Turning Pakistan around put U.S. policy to a pair of tests. Relations with the country had been poor even before the Musharraf military coup, for reasons of human rights, Islamabad’s nuclear arms, and its dangerous escalation of violence with India over Kashmir. Moreover, Bush, like Clinton, had been headed enthusiastically toward a new strategic relationship with India partly aimed at China. Musharraf would therefore have to be persuaded that there was a strategic signing-up bonus if he enlisted in the war against terrorism. Simultaneously this had to be fitted so that New Delhi did not recoil from Washington or open a “second front” with Islamabad that impaired the war on terrorism.

The Pakistani general quickly understood his strategic choice. He preferred the risks of a new relationship with Washington over the certainty of isolation and possibly American military action if he refused. Musharraf wanted a quick campaign that did not install an anti-Pakistani government in Kabul, but he was unable to rent Pashtun infantry to take the Taliban from the South; this left the U.S. to rent the infantry available from the Northern Alliance. Extraordinary American efforts to make sure that a new Afghan government was not dominated by anti-Pakistani Tajiks under Russian or Indian influence were only partially successful. Still, Musharraf emerged from the campaign the beneficiary of both U.S. aid and diplomatic patronage.

Powell tried hard to pass the second test, that of relations with New Delhi. Could Washington duplicate its 1980s trick of doing better with both the sworn enemies? In practice this meant getting India and Pakistan to restrain hostilities over Kashmir. As the military campaign neared its end and the tricky business of reassembling Afghanistan began, Pakistan’s own record as a host of terrorists was thrown to the fore when on December 13 a new crisis was ignited by the suicide bombing of the Indian parliament.

Both Bush and Powell tried to ease the new military confrontation by insisting that Musharraf pay “his dues” in suppressing the terrorists but urging India to hold fire while the general cleaned house. In this game, the Hindu-dominated Vajpayee government would never be tempted by flexibility. Nor was it interested in third party mediation over Kashmir, at least not until Musharraf had run the maximum risk domestically.

Whatever the outcome of the crisis, the Pakistani strategic choice had been accompanied by an American choice too. The United States picked up Pakistan, a stumbling once-allied state afflicted by Muslim extremists, and Afghanistan, a collapsed state ruined by tribalism and fanaticism run amok. Washington would have to defuse the Kashmir conflict to save its newly revised ally in Pakistan, and this too was the key to advancing the promising relationship with India. It was a tall order: rebuilding an Afghanistan that was neither anti-Pakistani nor convulsed by tribal warfare; assisting a Pakistan
recovering from its recent bout with Muslim extremists and ready to ease the
older quarrel with India; gaining Indian confidence that the United States
could help in patching the subcontinent even as New Delhi and Washington
sought a strategic relationship.

Was this the hated nation-building on a subcontinental scale? Or was it
what the United States had done before in Europe or elsewhere—namely,
to assure the level of security that enabled governments to reform their
nations in their own way, albeit at a faster pace? In early 2002, the Bush
administration hoped—and planned—that it would do the latter while
international aid agencies and other allies busied themselves with the former.
Still, even this would not be achieved unless the end game in Afghanistan—a
U.S. victory—could somehow be followed by an easing of the Indian–
Pakistani conflict. In short, victory over terrorism had not yet been conveyed
diplomatically into a larger regional settlement.

Russia Moves West

A month after the September 11 attacks, Powell summarized the
impact on U.S.–Russian relations: “What happened on September 11th didn’t
start something, it accelerated [an improvement in relations] President Bush
wants to make permanent.”6 The odd couple of Bush and Putin, the United
States and Russia, were brought dramatically nearer by the terrorist assault.
Both sides had good geopolitical reasons to cooperate, at least at the outset.

Putin was the first foreign leader to contact Bush on September 11
and within a week he offered Russia’s support, signaling to the Russian-
dominated Central Asian states that they should cooperate with the American
military expedition. While many were surprised by Moscow’s action, Putin’s
decision could be readily understood. He had his own much criticized war in
Chechnya against Muslim rebels, and the weak and inept dictators who rule
most of post-Soviet Central Asia were being pressed by insurgents operating
out of Afghanistan. The Russian military had neither the reputation nor the
resources to defeat them. In short, for Putin, the U.S. war against terrorism
would solve a growing problem for him in Central Asia, allow him a fresh
hand in an Afghan settlement and secure Bush’s gratitude.

Of course, U.S. relations with the “-stans” also meant a new source of
money and influence for the local rulers and strong competition for their
affections (and resources). The Russian gamble here would be that neither
Bush nor the American people wanted to stay very long in the region.
Despite the complaints of the anti-Americans around the Kremlin, Putin saw
his opportunity with Bush and he took it. Whether he could charge
Washington for the privilege of solving his Central Asian problem remained
to be seen. Having secured Moscow’s enthusiasm for the first phase of the

war in an area crucial to the campaign, U.S. policy toward Russia was soon grappling with Moscow’s favorite nettles, NATO and strategic arms.

The Bush policy on both, as set forth in the president’s June 15 Warsaw speech, had grand overtones. NATO would expand again, bumping up against Moscow’s interests in the Baltics and Ukraine. Bush and his officials also pressed for either the end of the ABM treaty or a modification that would allow for more testing, a prelude to eventual deployment. The Russians had strongly opposed both initiatives before September 11.

To ease the NATO issue, British prime minister Tony Blair (with U.S. support) suggested that Moscow be given an unofficial but de facto membership in NATO on certain issues. Was this merely a rhetorical adaptation of the Coordinating Council created by Clinton and Yeltsin but rendered stillborn over the Kosovo War? Did it give Russia a new veto over certain alliance actions, as NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson implied, or merely state the truism that Russia could block activity by NATO that needed Russia’s cooperation to carry out?

The United States called it “NATO at Twenty.” Powell described the concept as a way to “pursue this dialogue” with Russia; Rumsfeld declared his support for practical cooperation with Russia but denied that NATO-20 was de facto membership. This was a pudding with the theme of cooperation but ingredients unknown.

The other big issue between them—missile defense—had not been resolved. Powell argued successfully that before withdrawing from the ABM treaty much missionary work—by those who believed in it—should be done in Europe, China, and Russia. The former general was skeptical about “silver bullet” solutions; he understood Moscow’s argument that a limited system could eventually become more capable, changing the balance of power. Powell also preferred to carry on with the codification of relations through treaties and the like, a red flag for those who feared further and fatal delay.

While an ABM system would not have stopped September 11, the assaults made clear that there were people willing to risk American retaliation, i.e., they had not been deterred. Bush himself seems to have decided that a try with Putin was worth it but not if it spelled indeterminable delay. He brought the issue to a head by offering publicly to cut arms levels to 1,700–2,200 warheads, a steep drop even from the 3,000 of the unexecuted START II levels and close to what the Russian military hoped to sustain under their straitened conditions. Presumably this bargain, giving Russia what it wished in the offensive arms area, would be reciprocated by Putin’s willingness to alter the ABM treaty. Putin was willing but only if the reductions were negotiated in treaty form; on the ABM he wanted specifics of the tests, to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

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At a Washington press conference on November 13, 2001, following these exchanges, Bush announced the cuts only to find Putin insisting that the transaction fit the pattern of the previous arms control structure, a “trust but verify” approach redolent with irony; Putin appeared to claim Reagan’s mantle from the man intent on fulfilling the ABM part of Reagan’s legacy. To Bush’s advisors, this looked like the feared “talk, talk, delay, delay” formula.

On December 13, 2001, Bush announced U.S. intentions to withdraw from the ABM treaty in six months. Putin called it “a mistake” but declared it was no threat to Russia; he doubted missile defense would work anytime soon, praised Bush for an honest approach and emphasized that this would not affect good U.S.–Russian relations. Russia’s business with NATO was more significant; there would be no “anti-American hysteria.”

Putin had chosen to go West. There was no more talk of joining with China to oppose “hegemony.” Beyond this strategic decision by Moscow lay some serious tests. Would Russia cooperate in taking on Iraq or Iran? In December, Putin agreed to Powell’s earlier idea about smart sanctions, provided the devilish details could be worked out. He also declared that Saddam should allow UN inspectors to return. This was encouraging but not yet conclusive.

Finally, the Russians were angling not only for foreign investment but also a piece of the American oil market. Moscow’s main offer would be a stable supply from a non-Muslim state with strong interests in cooperation with the West.

Bush’s surprising early tendency to see Putin as a historic partner had been confirmed in the president’s eyes by Russia’s approval of the war on terrorism. Putin’s turn West had indeed accelerated to the point where Bush could advance his ABM plan without fear of a crisis with either Moscow or NATO allies. The Russians reaped a payoff in the American victory that promised to stabilize Central Asia. But there were big tests ahead: the strategic ally issue remained unsettled, nor had the NATO relationship been defined. Most important, the war on terrorism would tangle sooner or later with the Russian–Iranian arms sales. Still, the potential for broad-based reconciliation with Russia, unrealized during the Yeltsin years, was no doubt tantalizing Western statesmen.

The Middle East: Paying the Dues

Of all the regional conflicts the Middle East posed the biggest challenge for U.S. policy following September 11. Osama’s attacks laid bare a dangerous tangle: a historic tension between the Muslim Arabs and the West overlaid by the Arab–Israeli trouble; the unsettled business in Iraq; an Iran torn between reformers and Khomeini’s heirs, with relations to the United

States a symbolic dividing line. America’s Saudi ally was shaken by anti-Americanism, willing to help but taking refuge in old conspiracy theories to explain the outburst of U.S. criticism of the Kingdom. And finally Egypt, a friendly power benefiting from U.S. aid that nonetheless carried in its government-controlled press some of the most anti-American (and anti-Semitic) journalism in the region.

As in 1990–91 when Saddam claimed that he had seized Kuwait en route to Jerusalem, the Arab powers sought to link U.S. support for Israel with the terrorist phenomena. This was the “draining the swamp” metaphor: terrorism could be deprived of popular sympathy if the United States only forced Israel to satisfy Palestinian demands. George W. Bush’s administration, like his father’s, understood that some active diplomacy on the issue would make it easier for the Saudis and Egyptians to support the United States.

Washington, therefore, launched a two-part initiative. Israel, as in 1990–91, would be only a silent member of the coalition, urged to be quiet and flexible, i.e., suffer American overtures for Arab support. (Sharon liked this no more than Shamir during the Gulf War and soon complained about “appeasement.”)

The second part was to bring Arafat firmly into the anti-terrorism club on condition that he paid the dues, i.e., close down Hamas, Hezbollah, and the like as part of a cease-fire, the precondition to negotiations with Israel. The dues were discounted indirectly by adding a political incentive.

This was Powell’s plan, already being considered before September 11, to break the Israeli–Palestinian impasse by giving Arafat a good reason to end the violence but without compromising vital Israeli interests. On November 13, after Bush himself had broken the news earlier, Powell put the U.S. officially for the first time behind a “viable Palestinian state.” Even Sharon had spoken of statehood as part of an interim agreement with Arafat. (The “viable” adjective, a classic State Department circumlocution, signaled American support for a state larger than what Sharon wanted.) Thus, equipped, a special envoy with a tough reputation and a background in the Gulf, retired Marine General Anthony Zinni, was dispatched in expectation that he would have to pressure Sharon to accept Arafat’s “one hundred percent effort” in place of the highly unlikely seven days complete quiet demanded by the Israeli prime minister.

Arafat had already determined that he would not repeat 1990–91, when the Palestinians sided with Saddam. Suppressing Palestinian demonstrations on behalf of Osama, he indicated his readiness to join the United States. But when Zinni arrived, he found Arafat reluctant to pay the dues. Instead of diminishing violence it increased and the America envoy left embittered at Arafat’s performance. Another series of suicide bombs produced such international and Israeli pressure on Arafat that he called for a general cease-fire on December 16. He also began selective arrests of terrorists on the U.S. and Israeli list but on the whole was clearly intent on
avoiding the strife that might attend the complete suppression of Hamas. Israel’s seizure of fifty tons of arms directly traceable to the Palestinian leadership on a PA-owned ship on January 7, 2002, gave further proof that Arafat’s new interest in a cease-fire was a tactical rather than a strategic change.

While the potential for an erratic cease-fire still remained, this episode illustrated that the new opportunity offered by September 11 to move Israel and the Palestinians into renewed diplomacy had run aground on the rocks of Arafat’s bent for violence and Israel’s determination to cut him no slack. The United States was not inclined to discount the dues any further, hoping it had done enough to ease European and Arab pressure. Still, the next step—a resumption of negotiations—seemed beyond reach because Arafat had simply ceased to be a credible partner.

The PA ship bore Iranian arms. This pointed up the challenge facing U.S. policy in coalition politics. Tehran was both with the U.S. and against it. Although briefly helpful in Afghanistan, otherwise Iran fully justified its record as a supporter of terrorism. Tehran was also seeking nuclear weapons with Russia’s assistance. It would inevitably be a major test of the Bush policy. Could the United States press Iran successfully without Russia’s help and would Russia help? Iran’s intervention into the already overheated Israeli–Palestinian conflict was an escalation that could have taken events out of Washington’s control.

**Terrorism, War and Diplomacy**

Summing up the first year of Bush’s foreign policy, General Powell cited the Russian, Chinese, and European relationships as success stories. He also asserted that the administration’s style had been broadly accepted: “I think we showed the world that when it serves our interests and when it serves the interests of the world to be multilateral to use the clichéd term of art, we will do so. And when, on a matter of principle, we cannot join with others on a position as a matter of principle, we will stand on that principle.” Powell’s assertion had a good deal going for it.

The nineteenth-century British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli, who suffered his own difficulties in Afghanistan, once observed that nothing succeeds like success. America’s demonstration of its military prowess, indeed the entire Bush diplomatic effort, confirmed its sole superpower status. But by early 2002, the president was entering not only the tricky end game in Afghanistan but the recurring regional nightmares thus far only aggravated by the war, both in South Asia and the Middle East. More strategic choices await the United States and its odd partners in this war, some of

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whom are both allies and targets. Overlooked business, whether in South America or in the economic consequences of September 11, will soon press upon the administration. While Bush, like most U.S. war presidents, enjoys bipartisan congressional support and public acclaim, this will inevitably diminish in the course of a protracted conflict. In short, the easier phase of the war is over.

In broader perspective, the events of September 11 and their aftermath abruptly brought down the curtain on the post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy. Dominated for a decade by the themes of globalization and humanitarian intervention, America was ushered through a “gate of fire,” to use UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s term, into a new realism about the world. Key relationships were either in poor shape or slipping away. American adversaries were even tougher and far more dangerous than understood. And the American military had more to do than peacekeeping.

American foreign policy will now use the war on terrorism as the fulcrum upon which to refashion its most important relationships. Priorities include a new deal with Russia, a deepening role in reconciling India and Pakistan, a quick revival of the Arab–Israeli negotiations and a possible fresh start with Iran. All of this will be measured against progress in the war itself. Experience thus far reinforces the view that success in this protracted conflict, even as victory in the Cold War, will not guarantee the peace. That will have to be won anew, region by region, relationship by relationship. This mission will soon make the Bush pragmatists new visionaries and not only to see the world safe from terrorism. The opportunity to win a new, more secure peace has risen from the ashes of September 11.