

The Challenge of Managing Dominance



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*A*t the beginning of the twenty-first century, the United States finds itself in brand-new territory, which historically is very dangerous terrain, and one which we are very ill-prepared to deal with as a country. This territory is the role of global hegemony, and the new foreign policy challenge can be captured on a bumper sticker: the challenge of managing dominance.

No other power, at least in the last 350 years, as long as we've had nation-states, has ever had a global reach comparable to ours. Britain ruled the seas and its own colonies, but did not ever attempt to dominate the globe. There have been a couple of other attempts at hegemony since the Treaty of Westphalia—the event generally considered to signal the creation of the modern nation-state. The Hapsburgs tried it, Louis XIV tried it, Napoleon tried it, Japan tried, Germany tried it twice, and the record is pretty clear of the result. So the question is, how are we going to do at managing this challenge of dominance?

We had one answer for it, a fantastically successful one, after World War II, when for a brief period we were even more dominant in the world, both in a security sense and economically, than we are today. In those immediate years after the war, the United States represented 50 percent of the world's economy—everybody else was really smashed. Until the Soviets got nuclear weapons, we stood alone militarily as well. Everybody knows what we chose to do then, which was to invest immensely in global public goods, to create a whole raft of institutions. We reached the conclusion that a long-term policy of building the economies of other countries was going to be the most important thing we could do in our own interest, and it was, in fact, an extraordinarily successful policy for decades. Now we are at a moment of making a historic choice again, in very different circumstances, and we seem to be heading down a very different path.

It is remarkable that, just a few years ago, no one used the word “empire” in the same sentence with the word “United States,” except for the far left fringe. It was not something the mainstream talked about. Now it has become routine. In fact, the only way to get foreign policy books onto the front table in bookstores right now is to put the word “empire” in the title. There are at least eight such books out there now.

The current American empire is enormously different from those that preceded it. Even those who advocate a very aggressive American stand do not want to conquer and occupy territory. However, the changes in technology, in the size of our economy, and in globalization make it possible to impose our will from a distance—without occupation—and perhaps to an even greater degree than that afforded by direct occupation. Also, today, the perception of dominance is much, much greater, much more immediate.

We do not need to occupy a foreign land to have the same degree of influence over its fortunes or to have the same sense of intrusiveness on its future that those who occupied in the past did. And of course we’ve never had technological levelers like nuclear weapons before.

CAN DOMINANCE LAST?

The first question to ask about managing dominance is whether a moment of dominance like this can last. There are many people who believe it can and will. I am not one of them because the basic driving force of history is human nature. Human nature has its passions, its irrationality, its greed, and its propensity to feel fear, envy, resentment, and misunderstanding across cultures. These aspects of human nature will not change. They are hard-wired.

So no matter how powerful we appear to be at this moment, our moment will be limited, like everyone else’s has been. With that transience in mind, we should approach this historical moment with a keen sense of the limits that we confront rather than with a feeling of triumphalism.

WHAT WORLD ORDER AFTER OUR MOMENT ENDS?

How should we, then, attempt to shape some sort of policy? To me, the best guide is to ask what kind of world order we would like if we were *not* in charge; or put differently, what kind of world order would you like to have the day *after* our moment of dominance ends? If one thinks of it this way, then the questions to ask and attempt to answer arise pretty naturally.

How much international law do you want to have? How much trust among nations? How much cooperation across borders? How strong or weak a set of international institutions do you want to rely on? Or do we rely on ad hoc coalitions shaped for each mission, as Donald Rumsfeld has advocated?

The difficulty with ad hoc coalitions that doesn't get enough attention in the current debate is that they only constitute a crisis-management strategy. They don't leave you anything for dealing with issues between crises. The only way you can do that is with institutions.

AMERICA'S LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

We as a country are poorly prepared for our role of dominance in terms of the knowledge of American citizens about the rest of the world. There probably has seldom been such a mismatch as now between the power of a country and its rulers and the degree to which its population is informed about the world.

Just to give you an example, polls show that a majority of the American public believes there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and a near-majority believes there is an absolute connection between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda—exactly the reverse of what the facts are. This long after the war, it's astonishing the percent of the American people who still believe that there was a connection. Indeed, there are a great many who believe that Saddam Hussein was *responsible* for September 11.

I was in New York during the war one day, taking a taxi in from the airport, and the taxi driver asked me something about the war. I asked if he was in favor of the war, and he said, "Oh, of course I am. . . . I lost a friend on September 11." When I said, "Well, what does that have to do with it?" I thought we were going right off the bridge. But he took it as a given Saddam Hussein was responsible, and he would not hear that Saddam and bin Laden are not the same person. We must improve the knowledge base of our citizenry if we are to effectively and wisely manage our power.

CHRONIC UNDERESTIMATION OF POSTWAR DIFFICULTY

In terms of managing global dominance, we have two options. One is widespread, active cooperation by a large number of nations. The other is unilateral action and particularly, certainly in the security field, use of force.

It is an interesting paradox that it takes bigger armies to manage "post-wars" than it takes to fight the direct hostilities. This is new, and it is a testimony to the power of our war-fighting technology and its sophistication and to the fact that the

post-war still has to be managed the old-fashioned way—door to door. This is a lesson that we have learned over and over again and that we keep forgetting.

There is an after-action report about our most recent intervention in Panama and the week of serious rioting that occurred after the intervention. The report concludes that we should have been prepared for the chaos in Panama because of our experience in Haiti. We keep learning this lesson, then forgetting it.

You may remember the fight between Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz on the one hand and General Shinseki on the other about how many soldiers were going to be needed in Iraq. Shinseki in fact was right, but still on the low side. He was right not because of what was needed for the war, but what was needed for the post-war. Think of it in these terms: in Germany after World War II, we had 1,500,000 soldiers, and our sector in Germany covered something like 7,000,000 Germans. We now have about 150,000 people in Iraq, in a country of 24 million. That means the ratio of Americans to persons in the places occupied is roughly about one-fortieth as great in Iraq now as Germany then. We probably had more than we needed in Germany because those people had not yet been sent home or to the Pacific, but it gives an idea of the difference in the ratio.

We need a lot more soldiers to manage the peace. But more American soldiers will only make things worse, and we don't have more soldiers available anyway (with one-third of our active duty force already in Iraq). The only solution is to multilateralize.

Clearly, our technological dominance doesn't help us with post-wars or conflict management. But the more important point is that we as a nation now chronically underestimate the difficulties of the nonmilitary aspects of all our foreign interventions. We wildly inflate our nonmilitary goals in cases like this, without committing the resources that are required to achieve them.

For example, in Iraq our military planning was brilliant and detailed down to the placement of windows on individual buildings in Baghdad, so that weapons could be targeted in such a way as to produce the least collateral damage. This was an extraordinary level of detail, combined with fantastic flexibility. When Turkey refused to let us open the northern front, the plan was changed in a metaphorical minute.

Our planning for the post-war, on the other hand, was a blend of ignorance and wishful thinking. There was an elaborate plan that had absolutely nothing to do with the specific conditions in Iraq.

A DANGEROUS IMBALANCE

Under both major American political parties, we have developed, over the last twenty years, a dangerous imbalance in the priority that we assign to the use of force

and that which we assign to the use of the other tools at our disposal for foreign relations—diplomacy, intelligence, economic assistance, and democracy assistance.

We have now reached a sixteen-to-one ratio between the Pentagon budget and the budget for all other foreign operations combined. Sixteen to one in peacetime. We just don't take the nonmilitary side of what we do seriously. It is only on the nonmilitary side that we allow ourselves to indulge in goals, means, and public commitment that bear no resemblance to one another. That's what we did going into Iraq: We had a set of goals which included wildly unrealistic thoughts both about Iraq itself and about the region, we had a set of means, and then we had a set of conversations and public commitment with the American public. The three just don't belong on the same plane. They were completely disjointed.

This imbalance has gotten to a point where it is extremely hard to correct, in part because the State Department has come to be seen as so broken due to its chronic underfunding. And now Congress says "We're not going to put money into it because it's so broken." So then State gets more broken.

At the same time, the Pentagon has experienced a positive, upward spiral. For every dollar you can possibly spend, the technology gets better. So do your people, planning, training, exercises, scenario-building, and mid-career training. All the things that money can buy.

ALTERNATIVE POLICY

In my view, the Democratic Party has abandoned a serious role on security. You cannot run a country on any issue without an opposition, and the Democratic Party feels like it doesn't have credibility on security issues.

Just to give you a sense of what I mean, and I hope I'm not talking out of school, but I was asked to speak at a session on security policy at the House Democratic Caucus. It was a three-hour session, and they had a high turnout. I argued that, until the party could re-establish itself as a serious player on security, it could never again be a majority party. I said that this means more than just being opposed to things. There has to be a coherent set of principles that Democrats are *for*, a coherent strategy, and a carefully articulated budget.

During the discussion, people kept coming up with ideas related to oil conservation, noting if we used less oil then we wouldn't have to be running around invading countries. I said no, that's exactly what I'm *not* talking about. I'm not talking about energy efficiency. You can talk about energy efficiency until you are blue in the face, and nobody's going to think you're a credible player on national security. It's not the same issue.

Somebody else at the meeting talked about the importance of the role of women. Great—it's important that women have a greater role. But that's not a security strategy

either. We need a view on core security issues that is visible to the people of this country—a credible and serious alternative to the current one.

This case was laid out in a recent piece that Gary Hart wrote in the *New York Times*, one of the most important articles that has been written in a long time. He wrote that we ought to have a Democratic Defense Policy Board, including the best people from the other side of the aisle and developing these issues in a way that becomes a real resource for people inside. This is the kind of positive, focused action that is needed to bring the Democratic Party into the national spotlight and gain it a voice in the security issues in our country.

CONCLUSION

Many now incorrectly argue that the current aggressive American position on democracy and freedom is a return to Wilsonianism. It is true that Wilson was aggressive on democracy. But Wilson also believed that America ought to be embedded, deeply embedded, to use a current term, in international organizations and rules to which we were not an exception, but an integral part. In other words, Wilson believed that we had to be constrained by the rule of law. The current U.S. administration takes a completely different approach, which is that we should sit on a different plane, above the rest of the international community, and be unconstrained. According to the current fashion, constraints are *ipso facto* dangerous, and a bad idea for America, for the world, and for American security. That is a perversion of Wilson's principles.

What, then, should our goals be as we manage our current global dominance and prepare for a day when that dominance may not be ours?

First, America's foreign policy should be based on alliances, not ad hoc coalitions. Alliances reflect an underlying sharing of values and goals and a common community that does not have to be recreated every single time a problem requires action.

Second, in an era when more and more issues are moving from domestic to international, and from international to global, it stands to reason that problem-solving takes place in international space. So we need strong international institutions.

Third, foreign policy must recognize that issues, resentments, and positive relationships are not contained within a single forum, but are spread across forums. We cannot, for example, decide we want to be international on trade policy but unilateral on military policy.

Last, we must create a better balance in spending between diplomacy and force. There was never a secretary of state in a stronger position than Colin Powell to argue that the State Department has been chronically starved of money vis-à-vis the Pentagon. The tax cuts of recent years do not remotely allow America to pursue the kind of foreign policy that is needed.

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