Future Directions
For U.S. Foreign Policy

Balancing Status Quo and Reform

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Table of Contents

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Balancing Status Quo and Reform

Should the United States be a status quo power in its foreign policy, or should it instead seek fundamental change and reform? This is the question that the Stanley Foundation asked us to address. This thorny issue is being increasingly debated today with an intent focus on the Greater Middle East. For years, the United States was seen as a status quo power in this region of the world, supporting non-democratic regimes in the name of preserving stability, security, and access to oil. Beginning in late 2001, however, the United States dramatically switched gears by becoming a revolutionary power in the Middle East, seeking regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq and promoting rapid democratization throughout the region. Although those two countries now have elected governments, democratization efforts in the Middle East have been less than effective thus far. Not only have elections intensified sectarian strife between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq, they also have brought Hamas to power in Palestine, strengthened Hezbollah in Lebanon, and propelled a Holocaust-denier to power in Iran. Overall, the seeming result has been to make the Middle East more dangerous, to expose the limits on U.S. influence in the region, and to raise questions about the feasibility of establishing western-style democracy there. While the future is uncertain, this checkered record has reopened the issue of status quo vs. reform in ways that mandate constructive solutions not only in the Middle East, but elsewhere.[1]

Notwithstanding the Middle East's uniqueness, this issue is nothing new when it is seen in a global and historical context. For years, "realists" have argued that U.S. foreign policy should be anchored in a flinty-eyed focus on national interests, and this perspective often has led them to favor preserving the status quo because it offers stable security affairs. By contrast, "idealists" have called for U.S. policy to be based on liberal values, and this perspective often has led them to favor pursuit of fundamental changes and reforms in order to advance democracy, liberty, prosperity, and global cooperation. Observers caught in the middle of this noisy debate typically have called for a judicious mix of interests and values, and have correspondingly urged the United States to strike a sensible balance between preserving the status quo and seeking reforms.

In the face of growing difficulties for U.S. regime change policies in the Middle East, analysts and policy makers are considering the viability of returning to a set of policies with a greater emphasis on the status quo. A great deal of thought must be given to determining exactly how these two imperatives are to be blended together in the interests not only of overall policy coherence, but also to actually achieve the goals being sought. Serious analysis, rather than reliance on simplistic formulas, is needed. Without pretending to solve the myriad foreign policy dilemmas facing the United States and its allies, this paper offers a framework for how this analysis can be conducted, and where it can lead. The perspective is global, but along the way, insights are offered on the Middle East.

[1] For additional analysis of global trends and U.S. foreign policy options, see Hans Binnendijk and Richard Kugler, *Seeing the Elephant: The U.S. Role in Global Security* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books Inc., 2006)

Main Messages

Notwithstanding the arguments of some realists and idealists, U.S. national interests and values are not inherently antithetical—indeed, they are often harmonious and point toward the same policies. In cases where they are not compatible, protecting national interests normally is given precedence over promoting American values abroad. Yet when values can be pursued without harm to national interests, they can merit a good deal of commitment—provided the effort offers promise of success. As Henry Kissinger has pointed out, in a democracy it is often important to invoke values in the pursuit of national interests.[2] A classic case was President Woodrow Wilson's use of American values to justify U.S. participation in a World War that was also fully justified on the grounds of U.S. national interests. A war to defeat Germany and its allies in Europe was justified as a war to uphold liberal values, including human freedoms and self-determination.

Regardless of whether interests or values are being pursued, neither clinging to the status quo nor pursuing fundamental reforms is necessarily and always the proper choice. The strategic context matters hugely in judging between them. There can be situations when preserving the status quo makes sense, or when modifying it somewhat is appropriate, or when totally overturning it in order to pursue sweeping reforms is best. Much depends upon the specific U.S. national interests and values at stake and on prevailing geostrategic conditions, including what the political traffic will bear. Normally preserving the status quo is the easiest and safest route, but it can also be shortsighted. By contrast, pursuing reforms is more visionary, but it is usually harder and more costly, and it can be fruitless or even dangerous. In all cases, a careful appraisal of the tradeoffs—the costs, benefits, and other consequences of both courses of action—must be conducted, and the ultimate choice must be made on the basis of the specific situation being faced rather than abstract standards. *Globally, a balanced combination of policies is typically best not only because the world is a diverse place, but also because both extreme models—i.e. status quo or reform everywhere—can have deleterious consequences.*

The Middle East offers two extreme models, both of which are to be avoided. The most consequential "status quo" choice was American support for the Shah of Iran in the late 1970s. Reports from Iran made it abundantly clear that society there was in ferment and that lame status quo policies could not be sustained. Policy makers in Washington had preconceived notions about the risks of change but they were also unwilling to support repressive policies. The result was a disaster when the Shah fell. The Ayatollah Khomeini and an Islamic fundamentalist regime took power, and proclaimed the United States as an enemy. The archetype for the "reform" model to be avoided was the premature effort to bring democracy to Algeria in 1991. Algeria was unready for democracy and when it became clear that religious fundamentalists would take power democratically, the elections were aborted. The decisions to initiate and then halt the democratic process yielded years of bloody terrorist activity by the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front). The task of American foreign policy is to steer between the Scylla of Iran and the Charybdis of

[2] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994)

Algeria. But our recent regime change policies, in the eyes of critics, have us steering into the shoals.

What then are the implications for the Middle East today? Supporters of neoconservative principles have argued that the United States must seek rapid democratization of the region in order to counter growing support for radical Islamic fundamentalism. By contrast, critics argue in favor of deemphasizing democratization and emphasizing stability. This could include developing closer relationships with so-called mainstream countries, some with authoritarian governments, in order to provide a foundation of security against such threats as terrorism, WMD proliferation, continuing violence in Iraq, and Iran's growing ambitions. Lately, consensus seems to be switching in favor of the latter approach, but the future is uncertain.

Regardless of how the Middle East is appraised, U.S. policy toward it must be fitted into a larger global strategy that strikes a wise balance between the status quo and reform in a globalizing world of fast-paced changes with both encouraging and worrisome trends. A main argument for preserving the status quo in key places—such as Northeast Asia—is the need to protect stability and security, and thereby to guard against dangerous threats that could menace U.S. interests and the safety of close allies. In such places, some changes—e.g., WMD proliferation—are dangerous because they elevate competitive tensions and increase the risks of war. A main argument for promoting change is to help guide critical regions toward greater peace, democracy, and prosperity. In the eyes of many observers, the great success with democratization in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990's serves as a model for change: it not only installed democratic regimes but also brought greater stability and progress to the entire region. Yet, as we have seen in Iraq, endorsing constructive change in principle is far easier than bringing it about. Substantial resources and skill are required, as well as a healthy respect for practical constraints in a world that often is not readily malleable to U.S. designs.

The need to deal with these imperatives is the basis for a new U.S. foreign policy doctrine that we call "balanced engagement" which combines the best features of realism and idealism and of status quo and reform (discussed below).

Status Quo vs. Reform: The Strategic Calculus

Because preserving the status quo and pursuing reforms lie at the ends of a continuum, rather than being binary opposites, the choice between them is rarely a simple one. Sometimes the wisdom of preserving the status quo is self-evident: e.g., in order to prevent nuclear war. On other occasions, though, pursuing reform is clearly the best choice: e.g., strengthening the Non-Proliferation Treaty or encouraging democracy in countries poised to adopt it. In today's world, nonetheless, self-evident choices are the exceptions rather than the rule, and tough judgment calls must be made. Often, the overall foreign policy goals and strategic concepts being pursued by the United States and its allies can provide a useful framework for gauging strategic priorities when tough decisions must be made. Even so, such goals and concepts often are too abstract to

provide guidelines on how to deal with specific situations in which the devil lies in the details.

In such cases, the calculus for deciding between these two options can be expressed in a few simple strategic and economic propositions. Maintaining the status quo, and the relative calm associated with it, can make sense when an existing situation is already highly desirable (and thus does not need change), or when trying to improve upon a relatively acceptable (but imperfect) situation would entail unacceptably high costs and risks, or when seeking to alter a largely undesirable (but manageable) situation could easily backfire and make matters appreciably worse. By contrast, pursuing major changes and reforms in pursuit of significant progress makes sense when an existing situation falls short of a preferred state of affairs, a better situation realistically can be created through concerted effort, and the act of seeking such changes entails acceptable costs and risks. Conversely, pursuing change and reform can be unwise when it likely will not achieve its goals, or when the costs or risks are too high, or when second-order consequences can do more harm than good.

In this calculus, the choice between the status quo and reform boils down to a straightforward cost-benefit analysis, with the winner being the option that offers the best ratio of benefits to costs. When tradeoffs must be accepted—i.e. something gained in exchange for something lost—the winning option is the one whose marginal returns exceed its opportunity costs by the widest margin. The challenge of deciding how to act thus is often not one of choosing between contending theories of international politics or mastering opaque strategic doctrines. Instead, it is one of knowing how a few key principles can be applied to concrete, complex situations in which strategic trends are not clear and the consequences of acting, one way or the other, are hard to predict. When the status quo is not satisfactory, the task becomes one of recognizing whether opportunity for major change exists, correctly anticipating the consequences, and ensuring that the changes pursued will actually bring about the positive results being sought. In today's world, the assets and liabilities of both the status quo and reform can be hard to clarify and are subject to debate. In essence, uncertainty and unpredictability can make the choice truly difficult because the options and their consequences can neither be assessed with confidence nor accounted in a common unit of measurement. Unfortunately, today's complex world is so filled with confusing trends, uncertainties, and imponderables that deciding how to act is rarely an easy task.

In this setting, the United States, more than any other country, confronts compelling demands, challenges, and difficulties in grappling with the task of deciding between the status quo and reform. Unlike most other countries, the U.S. is a global power, and therefore must make a steady stream of decisions, great and small. Because the United States is heavily involved in virtually all key regions, and carries the weighty responsibility to help preserve order and peace in multiple unstable places, it normally cannot afford the luxury of staying aloof and watching from a distance while other countries try to chart their fates. Indeed, it has security treaties with many countries in Europe, Asia, the Greater Middle East, and other regions, and thus is obligated to come to their aid if they are threatened or attacked. Almost everywhere that counts in geopolitical

terms, it must start from with a clear sense of what it is trying to preserve or achieve. Its security responsibilities often nudge the United States toward preservation of the status quo, or at least to pursue change and reform cautiously and with great care. Even so, the United States is not motivated solely by its own pragmatic interests and *realpolitik* calculations. Owing to its internal values and domestic politics, it has long been a country with a sense of mission abroad, one aimed at propagating democracy, liberty, and prosperity, including in regions that lack all three. Long years of experience have taught it that progress in these areas is not only a worthwhile extension of its own deeply held values, but also can be vital to creating the conditions that enable peace and security to take hold. For the United States, its global role thus is not only to preserve order in security affairs, but also to also help promote progress when possible. Because inherent tensions can arise between preserving the status quo and seeking progress, pursuing both at the same time has always been difficult in the past, and it remains so today.

The key to American success in choosing between status quo and radical reform policies may not lie with global and ideological consistency but rather with regional pragmatism, including a clear appreciation of when democratic reform is feasible and when it might be counterproductive.

The Complex Historical Record

The manner in which the United States has pursued both order and progress, and often has been compelled to choose between them, can be crystallized by briefly recounting the historical record of recent decades. As this record shows, the United States has never been either a purely status quo country that is animated by power and stability, or a purely revolutionary power driven by ideals and reforms. Instead, it has typically sought to achieve a sensible balance of both imperatives, but with shifting degrees of emphasis between them in response to prevailing geostrategic circumstances. Often considerable successes were achieved. Yet, at the same time, frustrating setbacks were sometimes encountered and, in the eyes of critics, the United States did not always act wisely. Taking the record as a whole, the United States has seldom acted with only one imperative—order or progress—in mind.

During the Cold War, the United States was commonly viewed as a status quo power intent on preserving international order. This image was accurate in the sense that the United States chose to accept the bipolar security system that emerged from its rivalry with the Soviet Union. Concerned mainly about protecting its interests and its allies, while avoiding nuclear war, the United States embraced such status quo concepts as containment, deterrence, forward defense, and flexible response. Calls for rolling back Soviet power and communism were occasionally heard, but prior to the Reagan Administration they never gained much traction in U.S. policy, which sought to avoid provocative actions that might trigger confrontation, war, and escalation. Sometimes, its cautious behavior resulted in accusations that the United States pursued a “double standard” by rhetorically endorsing democracy even as it backed authoritarian regimes that helped contain totalitarian communism.

Behind the adoption of the containment strategy, nevertheless, the United States pursued change, reform, and progress more than is commonly realized. It devoted major efforts to installing and supporting democracy in Western Europe and Japan. In Asia, it encouraged a gradual evolution to democracy in South Korea and Taiwan that eventually succeeded. In Latin America, it quietly urged a shift away from authoritarian governments and command economies to democracy and market capitalism—an effort that bore fruit in the 1980's and afterward. Its stance toward the world economy was heavily reformist. Intent on producing sustained global economic growth and reducing poverty, it was a major leader in creating such institutions as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the G-7, and in gradually lowering trade barriers in order to increase global exports and imports. The bottom line is that the United States mainly was a status quo power in much of the Cold War because the dangerous situation permitted little else, but in arenas where progress was possible without great danger, it often took advantage of the opportunity.

President Ronald Reagan began to change the emphasis of America's global foreign policy away from the status quo and in favor of regime change. President Reagan's declaration that the Soviet Union was the "Evil Empire" connoted that disruptive change was needed. Traditional arms control, an effort to codify the nuclear status quo at stable levels, was challenged by President Reagan's emphasis on the Strategic Defense Initiative and on proposals for the elimination of all intercontinental ballistic missiles. Traditional arms control advocates were appalled by this shift away from status quo nuclear negotiations. Reagan's call to "tear down this Wall" was in fact a call to tear down the status quo. The fact that the "Evil Empire" did collapse after the Wall came down emboldened many to believe that regime change could work elsewhere.

In the Middle East, however, the Reagan Administration was a status quo advocate. Arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other Arab allies were designed to strengthen friendly regimes and enhance U.S. relations with them. The U.S. Central Command was created and forward operating bases were developed, but the U.S. military posture in the Persian Gulf region remained "over the horizon." Within the Gulf, the United States supported the status quo in Iraq and strengthened Saddam Hussein's regime in order to balance the radical regime in Iran. Only in Afghanistan did the Reagan Administration support a revolutionary policy, and that policy was developed as part of the new revolutionary policy — widely known as the Reagan Doctrine — against the Soviet Union rather than as a regional policy. The Reagan Administration policies were the antecedent of what today is called "offshore balancing."

When the George H. W. Bush Administration — hereafter the Bush 41 Administration to distinguish it from the current Bush Administration—came to power in early 1989, it inherited a Cold War that was rapidly coming to an end, with unknowable consequences for future global affairs. During its four years in office, the Bush 41 Administration developed a reputation for what we have called "traditional conservatism" in its approach to foreign policy. That is, it focused on national interests and pursuit of America's role as a superpower leader in search of consolidating the gains from victory in the Cold War. At a time of momentous change in the global status quo, the Bush 41 Administration

focused primarily on the U.S. national interest rather than on ideological values and in doing so it safely navigated the potentially dangerous disruptions that could have accompanied the collapse of the "Evil Empire."

The Bush 41 Administration maintained close ties with longstanding allies, sought equilibrium with other major powers through classical diplomacy, tended to favor the status quo rather than idealistic adventures and unpredictable upheavals, sought to engage selectively, and avoided messy involvements in situations at the periphery of U.S. commitments. Even so, it reacted with alacrity when the Soviet bloc began to fall apart, and it led its European allies in a vigorous, successful diplomatic effort that unified Germany, ushered the Soviet military out of Eastern Europe and dissolved the Warsaw Pact. It also maintained the integrity of NATO while reducing U.S. troop strength in Europe by one-third.[3] In Europe, it thus brushed aside the status quo and embraced major changes and reforms that advanced not only U.S. interests, but U.S. values as well.

Elsewhere, the Bush 41 Administration's stance was cautious, reflecting a desire not to change the status quo. In the 1991 Persian Gulf War, it ejected the Iraqi Army from Kuwait, but chose not to invade Iraq in order to topple Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. When Bosnia erupted in ethnic war, it distanced itself from any entangling involvements in the messy affair. In Asia, it maintained security commitments to close allies, sought normal relations with China, and did not confront that country's government over the Tiananmen Square massacre. Overall, its national security policy sought democratic progress in Europe and stable relations with Russia, but in Asia and the Persian Gulf, it followed a regional strategy that focused mainly on classical containment of adversaries, deterrence, and defense. Whether the Bush 41 Administration handled all of these issues wisely is debated by critics, but overall, its record was one of successfully seeking a blend of the status quo and reform in response to geostrategic conditions of that period.

When President William Clinton took office in early 1993, the Cold War was definitely over and a new era of international politics was underway. It was not clearly understood and hence the name "the post-Cold War era." At the time, there were no major power rivalries and most regions were unusually stable—the exceptions being the Balkans and parts of sub-Saharan Africa. In academia, there was renewed interest in what was called "democratic peace theory," the notion that democracies do not go to war with other democracies. Francis Fukuyama argued that liberal democracies were prevailing in a world-historic Hegelian dialectic and were there to stay. Samuel Huntington reinforced this by arguing that the "third wave" of democracy was delivering more and more nations to the democratic fold. Motivated by both national interests and liberal values, the Clinton Administration responded with a foreign policy that we have called "progressive multilateralism," animated by the strategic concept of enlargement, and employing soft power, diplomacy, multilateral approaches, and institution-building to pursue its goals.[4]

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[3] U.S. troop deployment in Europe at the end of the Cold War was 326,400; by the end of the Bush 41 Administration troop deployment in Europe was ~210,000. See The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1989-1990* (London: Brassey's, 1989) p 24 and The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1992-1993* (London: Brassey's, 1992) p 26.

[4] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of

Intent on taking advantage of an unusual era of tranquility in international affairs, the Clinton Administration's foreign policy sought to alter the status quo by adding new members to the democratic community, and forging closer global cooperation in pursuit of a prosperous world economy. It was especially active in Europe, where it launched the process of enlarging NATO into Central and Eastern Europe by admitting three new members: Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. It also broadly supported the European Union's emerging intent to expand eastward as well, all in the name of making Europe whole and free under the banners of democracy and market economies. In addition, the Administration sought to build partnerships with Russia and China—another departure from the status quo—and owing to its multilateralist principles, it supported numerous international treaties and institutions aimed at strengthening the governance of security affairs and the global economy. Elsewhere, however, the Administration was more cautious and more attentive to geopolitical hazards. In Asia, it maintained existing security alliances with Japan and South Korea, and endeavored to sign a Framework Agreement with North Korea that aimed at maintaining the status quo and preventing North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons. In the Middle East, it pursued the Oslo Peace Process in order to help settle the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, but in the Persian Gulf, it pursued a status-quo policy of dual containment against Iraq and Iran, and across the entire region it chose to work closely with friendly authoritarian governments rather than push for rapid democratization.

Although the first four years of the Clinton Administration were marked mainly by hopeful optimism for global peace, the last four years brought growing recognition of increasingly dangerous international trends, especially mounting terrorism, concern about WMD proliferation, and trouble with Iraq and Iran. The Administration's strategic concept shifted somewhat from an emphasis on the enlargement of the community of democracies to engagement in places where failing states might disrupt Western stability. Its national security strategy of "shape, prepare, and respond"[5] suggested a growing awareness that military power would need to accompany diplomacy. During the second Clinton Administration, the United States led NATO in peace operations in Bosnia and in waging war to eject Serbia from Kosovo, and it conducted limited military strikes against Iraq and terrorist strongholds. Likewise, it began to increase the defense budget and to prepare U.S. military forces for more expeditionary missions in distant areas. Thus, what began as an Administration devoted to expanding global peace and progress ended with an increasingly intent focus on handling dangerous security affairs and new threats. This change was driven partly by shifts in the Clinton Administration's own strategic thinking, but it owed mainly to deteriorating conditions in the geostrategic climate.

Historians are likely to conclude that during the 1990's, both the Bush 41 and Clinton Administrations responded to the electoral mandates that they received from the American people as well as to the prevailing international conditions. The Bush 41 "traditional conservative" grand strategy was exactly the measured approach needed to

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Oklahoma Press, 1991).

[5] The White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1994).

manage the change associated with the potentially dangerous collapse of a nuclear armed major world empire. The more value and change-oriented "progressive multilateralism" of the Clinton Administration and its policy of enlarging the community of democracies was the precise grand strategy needed to create a European continent "whole and free," an accomplishment of historic proportions. As a result, both administrations had the right grand strategy for their time in office and both achieved a large degree of success in their foreign policies. Together these two administrations helped unify and democratize Europe, and they helped keep Asia stable and economically prosperous, notwithstanding tensions on the Korean peninsula; in the Middle East, they mostly kept the lid on a tense situation in the years after the Gulf War of 1991.

When the twenty-first century dawned, however, international conditions had changed significantly for the worse, and a new administration entered office with different strategic perspectives in mind. It did so against the background of many academic writers beginning to argue that dangerous times lay ahead, owing to mounting chaos in world affairs. Examples of such writers include Samuel P. Huntington, Zbigniew Brzezinski, John Mearsheimer, and Robert Kaplan.[6] In addition, other writers stressed the empowerment that technology can provide to small groups of individuals, giving those groups some of the attributes of a nation state. The "Age of Empowerment" was punctuated by the events of September 11, 2001. [7]

During its tenure since early 2001, the George W. Bush Administration has pursued a foreign policy that we have called "assertive interventionism," anchored heavily in neoconservative principles. It entered office determined to depart from the progressive multilateralism of the Clinton Administration. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 introduced a new era of great dangers, and propelled the new administration into revolutionary policy departures that had not been anticipated. The Bush 43 Administration thus set about to intervene forcefully in the Middle East region. It saw, in that region, not only a hotbed of global terrorism but also a new totalitarian ideology of radical Islamic fundamentalism that threatened global order. Moreover, it judged that in dealing with the new threats, Cold War concepts like containment and deterrence as well as diplomatic approaches like negotiations and persuasion were ill-suited for the task.

Animated by a style that emphasized unilateral action, employment of military power, and preemption, its main actions in response to the September 11 attacks were to invade Afghanistan and Iraq in order to impose regime change in the two countries, to suppress al Qaeda terrorism, and to remove alleged weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. While its original motives thus were anchored somewhat in U.S. interests, the Bush 43 Administration was soon proclaiming a new intent that stemmed from American ideals: the rapid spread of democracy across the Greater Middle East—not only to Iraq and Afghanistan, but to other countries as well, some of them led by authoritarian or

[6] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of Global Order*: (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Scribner, 1993). John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001). Robert D. Kaplan, The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post-Cold War (New York: Random House, 2000).

[7] See Binnendijk & Kugler, *Seeing the Elephant*, pgs 105-159 for further explanation.

monarchical governments that had long been partners of the United States, but now were becoming worried about impending American efforts to alter their internal politics.

Thus far, the Bush 43 Administration has encountered great difficulties in bringing stability to Iraq, as well as ongoing troubles in Afghanistan. During 2001–2006, U.S. actions in the Greater Middle East were decidedly revolutionary, aimed at altering the status quo rather than preserving it. By early 2007, talk of installing democracy in Iraq and elsewhere was fading, and the Administration's public rhetoric was shifting toward working with friendly governments in order to preserve stability and order in the region. Elsewhere, the Bush 43 Administration has pursued a more traditional calculus: e.g., further enlargement and reform of NATO, stable relations with Russia and China, improved relations with India and Pakistan, diplomatic efforts to prevent North Korea and Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and further progress in lowering global trade barriers as well as alleviating poverty. But its reputation and legacy will be largely shaped by its forceful intervention in the Middle East, its assertive and controversial use of military power, and its ideology of democratization in a region that lacks experience with this form of government.

The historical record of recent decades thus shows that successive U.S. administrations have sought a blend of preserving the status quo and promoting constructive changes, and that the exact mix of these two approaches has varied with administrations' policies, often tailored to fit changing geostrategic conditions. More fundamentally, the historical record also shows that both the status quo and reform can be wise policy choices, yet when pursued in defiance of the realities and challenges at hand, both can produce negative consequences. Neither is an end in itself, but instead a means toward given ends. Much depends upon the situation being encountered, the goals being pursued, and the efficacy of actions taken by the United States and its allies.

Dealing with Today's Changing World

Any attempt to apply the calculus of status quo vs. reform to today's world must begin with globalization. The growing cross-border flows of trade, investment, technology, travel and migration is interacting with modern information networks to bring once-distant parts of the world closer together, creating ever-higher levels of political, economic, and social interaction. Owing to globalization, the intensity and pace of international affairs is increasing, the world economy has become hotly competitive, more countries are acquiring roles of growing importance on the world stage, and interdependence is growing. In addition, globalization and other dynamics are creating a world of accelerating change that is affecting all regions. Whereas the Cold War largely froze the world into a bipolar structure, today's world is highly complex and constantly in motion, regularly creating new patterns of actions, interactions, alignments, and frictions. If today's world has a formal structure, it can loosely be characterized as bifurcated: as divided into two parts: 1.) the wealthy and stable democratic community that encompasses North America, Europe, and parts of Asia; 2.) the rest of the world that includes 75% of the world's population yet only 25% of its wealth. But this bifurcated structure is highly transient, changing rapidly, and headed toward an unclear destination.

A world of accelerating change and growing interactions means that preserving the global status quo in some wholesale way is no longer possible even if some observers believe it is desirable. Too many global changes are at work and too many countries are pursuing new agendas for overall stasis to be viable. Europe is striving to achieve unity, such big powers as Russia, China, and India are defining new strategic identities, Asia is experiencing rapid economic growth and shifting security affairs, radical Islamic fundamentalists are trying to take over the Greater Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa is trying to elevate itself out of poverty, and Latin America is striving to establish effective forms of government in conditions where democracy and market capitalism are both being called into question. Beyond this, the new "Age of Empowerment" is enabling many non-state actors—from international institutions and multinational businesses to terrorists, ethnic groups, and religions—to exert influence over global affairs. Where these changes are headed is uncertain, but one thing seems clear: many of the trends are bringing both dangers as well as opportunities. An interdependent world in constant motion and poised between progress and peril creates an obvious need for leadership, governance, and rule-setting in both economics and security affairs.

In addition, the prospect of a troublesome world in continuous flux means that the United States, despite its superpower status, does not have the material capacity or influence to orchestrate events across the entire world. Events of recent years have revealed the limits to America's power, to its capacity to mobilize world opinion, and to its ability to intervene successfully in complex, violence-laden situations. Although some critics accuse the United States of being too powerful, the reality may be that, if anything, it lacks sufficient power and influence to perform its many roles and functions in international affairs. At best, it finds itself stretched thin. If the United States is to be successful in the coming years, it will need help from many countries, including its European allies, such major powers as Russia and China, as well as others. Beyond this, a strong case can be for strengthening global and regional institutions to help manage both economics and security affairs.

For the coming decades, the strategic task will be one of trying to guide fast-paced changes so that peace and order are preserved and global progress is achieved, rather than allow the future to degenerate into an era of growing chaos and strife. Often a foundation of security and stability will be needed in order for progress to occur; conversely progress will often be needed in order to preserve peace and order. Order and progress thus are not necessarily opposing imperatives, but instead can be mutually reinforcing and contributing to each other's success. Performing this delicate balancing act of blending both order and progress will be anything but easy, for today's world is proving to be both dangerous and often not malleable. Ten or fifteen years ago, many observers were optimistic about the future because they perceived an extended period of "neo-Kantian" dynamics at work. That is, they judged that democracy, market economies, and cooperative relationships were the wave of the future, destined to make most of the world both peaceful and prosperous. Today's world is very different. Although neo-Kantian dynamics are still silently at work in important ways, many observers perceive a host of "neo-Hobbesian" trends at work that are making the contemporary era and the future a

time of great difficulty and potentially growing danger. Among these adverse trends are terrorism, fanatical ideologies, WMD proliferation, ethnic violence, failed states, rogue countries threatening to commit aggression, the prospect of renewed rivalries among the major powers, unstable regional security affairs in the Middle East and Asia, widespread poverty that is not being alleviated by economic globalization, and growing doubts about the democratic community's ability and willingness to handle these dangers. Today, neither neo-Kantian dynamics nor neo-Hobbesian dynamics are dominant, but a struggle between them is underway, and the future will be determined by which of them prevails.[8]

Taking these competing trends into account, the United States and its allies face seven key strategic challenges in their efforts to guide the future toward a positive outcome:

1. Protect their homeland security, while defeating terrorism, halting or slowing WMD proliferation, and deterring rogue countries from aggression and malevolent conduct. Although the "long war" against terrorism will continue, WMD proliferation may be the greatest danger ahead not only because it could place nuclear weapons in the hands of rogue governments, but also because it could stimulate other countries to acquire these weapons in order to protect themselves.

2. Harness the democratic community to work closely in dealing with new-era security challenges arising outside their borders. The democratic community remains capable of defending its borders, but its ability to cooperate multilaterally in handling external challenges in the Middle East and elsewhere is far less impressive. Major improvements in political will and physical capability will be needed if America's allies are to shoulder greater burdens in dangerous regions.

3. Foster stable, constructive relations with the major powers of Russia, China, and India. Especially because Russia and China are now starting to assert their power and influence on the world stage, tranquil relations with them can no longer be taken for granted. Nor can the status quo in regions neighboring them be assumed. In particular, the Asia security system seems brittle, and could be stressed dangerously by China's emergence as a great power with geopolitical ambitions.

4. Promote stability and, to the extent possible, progress across the Greater Middle East and the entire "southern arc of instability," which stretches from the Middle East to South Asia and East Asia. This huge zone is the breeding ground of today's threats and contains many additional fault lines, flashpoints, and other potential sources of turmoil and violence that could endanger stability not only in the immediate neighborhood, but also global security.

5. Promote the consolidation and expansion of democracy around the world, while winning the battle of ideas that is pitting democratic freedoms against Islamic fundamentalism, tyranny, and other anti-western ideologies.

[8] See Binnendijk & Kugler, *Seeing the Elephant*, pgs 1-13 for explanation of Kant and Hobbes.

6. Spur a prosperous world economy through economic markets, investment, and free trade, while alleviating poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and other regions that are being left behind by globalization.

7. Halt genocide and ethnic strife, prevent other humanitarian disasters, slow global warming, and prevent pandemics.

Although a sense of caution is always prudent in a complex and dangerous world, these weighty strategic challenges cannot be handled by U.S. and allied policies that cling stubbornly to the status quo everywhere. Nor are these challenges susceptible to solution through the pursuit of some single-minded, revolutionary approach that is anchored solely in Kantian principles and aims for rapid progress everywhere at once. All of these challenges potentially can be handled, but none of them will be mastered easily. Once again, a judicious mixture of continuity and change will be needed. Strengthened global and regional institutions can help, but in the final analysis, the determining factor will be the political capacity of nation-states to work together. These seven challenges will require hard, persistent strategic labors—employing diplomacy and other instruments of power and influence—that address them on their own merits and that craft practical, effective solutions that prevent any descent into global turmoil and hopefully bring progress in steady, evolutionary ways.

Four Foreign Policy Options

What foreign policy approaches are available to the United States for handling these challenges with a satisfactory balance between preserving the status quo and seeking reforms? As shown below, today's academic literature offers four broad options that differ in their core philosophies, and have different enthusiasts and spokesmen. Whereas continued neoconservative interventionism is supported by the Bush 43 Administration, traditional conservatism is supported by such writers as Henry Kissinger and Richard Haass, progressive multilateralism is favored by Zbigniew Brzezinski and Joseph Nye, and off-shore balancing is favored by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt:[9] Two of these grand strategies, the neoconservative approach and the progressive multilateral approach, stress international reform. The other two, the traditional conservatives and offshore balancers, might be seen as more status quo in orientation. The four options are:

- *Continued neoconservative interventionism.* While adjusting at the margins for lessons learned in recent years, this option maintains the Bush 43 Administration's neoconservative predilection for muscular assertion of U.S. power on behalf of suppressing threats and promoting democracy.

[9] See: Henry A. Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001). Richard Haass, *The Opportunity: America's Moment to Alter History's Course* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005). Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination of Global Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 2004). John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005). For an analysis of neoconservative principles, see Robert J. Leiber, *The American Era: Power and Strategy for the 21st Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

- *Traditional conservatism.* Also called "realism" by some writers, this option would resurrect the emphasis on classical, big-power diplomacy pursued by the Bush 41 Administration during 1989–1992. Today, its main goal would be to maintain stable relations with such big powers as Russia, China, and India, while eliciting their help in dealing with such problems as terrorism and WMD proliferation.

- *Progressive multilateralism.* Also called "liberal internationalism" by some writers, this option would resurrect the emphasis that was placed on soft power, multilateral collaboration, and institution-building by the Clinton Administration. Today, its main purpose would be to mobilize help from the democratic community in Europe and elsewhere in dealing with contemporary problems, such as those arising in the Middle East.

- *Off-shore balancing*. This option calls upon the United States to reduce its profile in key regions, such as the Middle East, and to rely mainly on regional powers to handle security affairs there. The U.S. role would be limited mainly to intervening in the case of aggression by a malevolent power. A version of it was practiced in the Persian Gulf during the 1970s and 1980's, when the United States largely acted as an "over-the-horizon" power and sought to balance Iran and Iraq. After the Gulf War of 1991, it gave way to a continuing but limited U.S. military presence there. Today, its main goal would be to reduce alleged U.S. over-involvement in the Middle East and elsewhere.

As this table shows, these four options have sharply differing features in key areas:

	Neo-Conservative Interventionism	*Traditional Conservatism*	*Progressive Multilateralism*	*Offshore Balancing*
Kant vs. Hobbes	Mostly Hobbes, some Kant	Mainly Hobbes	Mostly Kant, some Hobbes	Mostly Hobbes, some Kant
Main Emphasis	Democratic Values	National Interests	Democratic Values	National Interests
Status Quo vs. Reform	Pursues Reform & Progress	Pursues Order & Stability	Pursues Reform & Progress	Pursues Order & Stability
Main Goals	Defeat Terrorism, Install Democracy in Middle East	Stable and Cooperative Big Power Relations	Mobilize Democratic Community to Defeat Threats and Promote Democracy	Lessen U.S. Over-Extension in Dangerous Regions
Main Instruments	Hard Military & Economic Power	Military Power & Diplomacy	Soft Power & Diplomacy	Soft Power & Diplomacy
Role of Alliances	Less Important	Important	Very Important	Very Important
Mechanisms of Success	Military Intervention & Coercive Action	Power-Balancing & Equilibrium	Diplomatic Persuasion & Alliance Reforms	Strong Regional Allies
U.S. Leadership Style	Path-Setting Leader of Ad-Hoc Coalitions	Architect of Big-Power Concert	Consensual Leader of Multilateral Alliances	Lowered, Less Engagement

Table 1. Premises of U.S. Foreign Policy Options

Neoconservative interventionism and progressive multilateralism both rely heavily upon propagating democratic values for their inspiration, they both strive to defeat terrorism, and they favor global reforms rather than preserving the status quo. There, however, the similarity ends. Whereas neoconservative interventionism relies upon muscular assertion of U.S. military power—unilaterally if necessary—progressive multilateralism places much greater emphasis on diplomacy and consensus-building with allies, and it employs soft power in order to pursue many of its reforms. In contrast with these two options, traditional conservatism and off-shore balancing both rely mainly upon national interests to determine priorities, and they both tend to favor preserving the status quo rather than pursuing democratization and other reforms. They differ considerably, however, in their goals, instruments, mechanisms of success, and U.S. leadership style. Whereas traditional conservatism relies upon classical big-power diplomacy, power balancing, and equilibrium to achieve order and stability, off-shore balancing relies upon regional countries to defend themselves and to achieve stability by directly deterring potential rogues and aggressors.

All four of these options have been employed at various times and places in the past, and all have had their share of successes and failures. As shown below, all four options offer pros and cons as candidates for dealing with today's world:

Continued Neoconservative Interventionism:

> Pros: Strong U.S. leadership, firm action against threats, vigorous support of democratization.
>
> Cons: Inattentive to alliance consensus-building, preoccupied with Middle East, inattentive to limits on U.S. power, unlikely to achieve democratization goals.

Traditional Conservatism:

> Pros: Attentive to big-power relations and need for stable equilibrium, favors vigorous use of classical diplomacy, cautious about intervening in difficult situations where U.S. interests are not involved.
>
> Cons: Can be too committed to status quo and insufficiently supportive of democratic reforms as counterweight to Islamic fundamentalism. Russia and China may be less prone to cooperation than hoped.

Progressive Multilateralism:

> Pros: Attentive to multilateral relations and consensus-building with democratic allies, committed to promoting democracy and progress globally.
>
> Cons: Can fail to recognize need for assertive U.S. leadership and willingness to use military power. Some allies may not cooperate or accept new missions.

Off-Shore Balancing:

> Pros: Attentive to limits on U.S. power and seeks increased security roles and responsibilities for allies in key regions.
>
> Cons: Can underestimate need for strong U.S. presence in unstable regions, can over estimate capabilities of allies, and vulnerable to delaying U.S. intervention too long.

How can these four options be appraised? Together, they offer a rich menu of choices for determining how to pursue U.S. interests and values abroad, for striking a balance between the status quo and reform, and for choosing among different leadership styles and mechanisms of success. Whether any one of them can serve as an effective, all-encompassing doctrine for U.S. foreign policy in the coming years is less clear. While all of them have appealing strengths, all have troubling drawbacks as well. Perhaps most important, each of them relies mainly on a single mechanism of success to accomplish its purposes. To the extent that each of these mechanisms lacks sufficient power to bring about global success, all four options leave something to be desired, and thus create a rationale for a different, more-encompassing approach.

Option Five: Balanced Engagement—A Family of Good Ideas

To guide American national security policy for the decade to come, we propose a new grand strategy which we call "balanced engagement." Balanced engagement aspires to provide a sound approach for handling the strategic challenges ahead and for pursuing key strategic goals with clear priorities and achievable agendas in mind. Compared to the other four options, it offers a new and distinctly different policy that is anchored not in a single type of strategic reasoning, but instead in a family of worthwhile ideas that are brought together to form a strategic whole. *While it preserves the positive features of neoconservatism, balanced engagement, at its core, represents a co-equal synthesis of traditional conservatism and progressive multilateralism.* Rejecting withdrawal into isolationism, it seeks the type of sustained U.S. involvement that makes sense, is viable and affordable, and will achieve its goals. Anchored in a combination of interests and values, it is a global policy with a full set of multiregional and regional components, and that pays attention to both security affairs and the world economy. It endeavors to strike a workable balance between preserving the status quo and pursuing reform, between the ends and means of foreign policy, between voicing American preferences and listening to other countries, between the imperatives of assertiveness and restraint, and between hopeful expectations and pragmatic acceptance of realities.

Balanced engagement borrows the best features from the other four options in the following ways:

- From neoconservative interventionism, it takes the continued United States international involvement, a global leadership role, and a focus on defeating such new-era threats as terrorism, WMD proliferation, fanatical anti-western

ideologies, and rogue states. Balanced engagement views the suppression of these threats as the highest priority goal and critical to achieving progress in the Middle East and elsewhere. While willing to employ military power when necessary, it would not rely mainly upon unilateral action and preemption to accomplish this goal. Diplomacy would be its preferred instrument of choice, even though selective military actions may prove necessary when negotiations run their course.

- From traditional conservatism, it borrows intensified diplomacy with such major powers as Russia, China, and India in order to prevent any return to big-power rivalry and to elicit their help in dealing with today's key global challenges. Balanced engagement would employ diplomacy and negotiations with these powers aimed at creating a balanced equilibrium of legitimate interests that helps preserve stable relationships with them. Against this background, it would endeavor to develop cooperative political relations with these countries in suppressing key threats and controlling other dangers.

- From progressive multilateralism, balanced engagement reemphasizes soft power and pursues stronger multilateral collaboration—political and military—with NATO allies as well as other democratic partners and close friends. It would endeavor to strengthen NATO's military capability and political decisionmaking for expeditionary missions outside Europe. While it would not transform NATO into a global alliance, it would strengthen NATO's military cooperation with such democratic countries as Japan, South Korea, and Australia in order to provide a greater capacity for expeditionary missions with them.

- From off-shore balancing, balanced engagement takes a reminder of the limits on U.S. power, prudent action in the face of complicated situations, and an effort to build improved regional security architectures in the Middle East and Asia (regions that lack multilateral security institutions to help handle modern dangers). In both regions, it would work closely with friends and allies to help build a greater capacity for multilateral diplomacy and combined military operations. As these regional security architectures gradually gain strength, they could provide opportunity for the United States to devolve greater responsibility and influence onto its friends and allies, thus enabling the United States to husband its resources and to gain greater flexibility.

Whereas neoconservatism sometimes is accused of being preoccupied with wielding American power, a key characteristic of balanced engagement is that it seeks to form a co-equal partnership between power and diplomacy. In doing so, balanced engagement calls for a concerted diplomatic effort to work with big powers, with allies and friends, and within such international institutions as the UN in order to develop common approaches for handling strategic problems. Whereas each of the other four options emphasizes only one main mechanism of success, balanced engagement offers four: power balancing and equilibrium, soft power and diplomacy, creation of strengthened regional security structures in the Middle East and Asia, and, when necessary, military intervention and coercive action. Its ability to offer multiple mechanisms of success,

rather than just one, increases the odds that it will perform better than any of the other four options, and it reduces the risk of failure if one or more of these mechanisms do not perform well. In essence, it avoids placing all of its eggs in one basket.

The basic strategic concept of balanced engagement is that if the United States can mobilize greater help from its democratic allies and such major powers as Russia and China, it will be better able to wield constructive power and influence in responding to today's strategic challenges. Likewise, the act of creating better regional security structures in the Middle East and Asia will help remedy power vacuums in both regions and provide a greater capacity to respond to local situations. The combination of multilateral action by the United States and its partners plus stronger regional security structures will provide an enhanced capacity to handle emerging threats to peace and stability. A more tranquil security situation in key regions, in turn, will help set the stage for pursuing progress, including democratization and economic modernization, with improved prospects of success.

The strength of balanced engagement is that it employs multiple leadership styles and mechanisms of success, and focuses intently on using diplomacy to achieve greater cooperation with close allies as well as major powers. Owing to this diversity, balanced engagement is not an easy policy to implement, nor is it a ready cure-all for all of America's global dilemmas. It promises to be demanding because it mandates not only vigorous action in multiple arenas, but also close coordination among them. It requires skillful execution of U.S. multilateral diplomacy with a large number of countries, some of them not close friends of the United States. It also requires a capacity to set priorities and make tradeoffs in cases where its main goals and instruments do not automatically mesh well together. The greater energy and diplomatic skill it demands, however, is justified by its promises of substantial rewards, including greater international receptivity to U.S. global leadership. Balanced engagement strives to be selective about overseas involvements in order to avoid quagmires, and to keep from extending the United States beyond the limits of its power. Yet its intent is not to place handcuffs on America's global role or to sharply curtail its freedom of maneuver. Instead, its main purpose is to seek increased international collaboration that will help the United States carry out its role, and thereby provide enhanced power and flexibility for adapting to global changes and shaping the future.

Balanced engagement calls for the United States to continue playing a leadership role, but not a military-centric role. Instead, it aspires to make full use of all instruments of national power, including multilateral diplomacy and economic aid in order to accomplish its purposes. It would, however, maintain sizable U.S. military forces in Europe and Asia, and configure them for new missions, including WMD defense and expeditionary strike. The future U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf will need to be determined by the outcome of Iraq. Although a low U.S. profile would lessen Islamic anger at the United States, some forces may be needed to help protect local friends and allies. Defense transformation will need to focus on both enlarging U.S. ground forces and modernizing all services with new weapons and information systems.

Because today's world is a dangerous place, balanced engagement would focus heavily on the imperatives of preserving stability, security, and order in the Middle East, Asia, and elsewhere. As an outgrowth of this stance, the United States would be willing to work with all governments that seek a peaceful international system—including authoritarian governments that show a level of respect for the welfare of their people. For example, it would work with such regimes in order to step terrorism, prevent WMD proliferation, and prevent regional aggressions. Balanced engagement, however, is not synonymous with clinging to the status quo or embracing repressive regimes. It would pursue opportunities for reform and progress in places where they exist and tangible improvements can be made—as has been done regularly in the past. While it would not pursue democratization through coercive military steps aimed at imposing regime change, it would employ diplomacy, aid, and other measures to encourage progress toward creating the underlying social, economic, and political conditions that allow democracy to take hold in new places. Although much of the Middle East may not be ripe for democracy now, other regions, including Asia and Eastern Europe, are making progress and should be encouraged. Likewise, balanced engagement would view economic progress as a critical trend that can help democracy to take hold. In these ways, it would help enable the United States to be a pillar of constructive order and a beacon of hope and progress, as well as a close partner for countries of similar instincts on the world stage.

Closing Comments

During the past six years, the unilateral regime change agenda of the neoconservatives has ran into deep trouble in Iraq. That has raised the question put to us by the Stanley Foundation: should the United States revert to more of a status quo national security policy?

The answer is complex. A review of the 1980s and 1990s demonstrates that both status quo and reform policies have enjoyed successes. Much depends upon how the policies are implemented, and on a dispassionate cost-benefit analysis of the individual cases being considered. In the future, radical reforms implemented unilaterally will probably be restricted in what might be called an "Iraq Syndrome," similar to what happened after U.S. setbacks in Vietnam and Somalia. And yet supporting status quo policies in a world that is rapidly changing is also not an adequate answer. Therefore, we have suggested a new approach called "balanced engagement" which takes the best of previous grand strategies and mixes elements of both status quo and reform. We believe that "balanced engagement" is the answer to the Stanley Foundation's question.