



**To Lead the World:
American Strategy after the
Bush Doctrine**

Edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and
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In June 2007, as the George W. Bush administration's batteries died, the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs hosted a 2-day workshop called "After the Bush Doctrine: National Security Strategy for a New Administration." The event brought together 10 U.S. scholars—historians, political scientists, and economists—from across the political spectrum and tasked them each with writing a concise national security statement. The statements were to offer advice to future officials on the overall goals of national strategy, and to identify and assign priority to the greatest threats facing the Nation. This book is a collection of the responses.

To Lead the World is notable for the prominence and eclecticism of its contributors. Few editors can entice such high-profile names as Samantha Power, Francis Fukuyama, and Niall Ferguson to write for them. Even fewer volumes can

simultaneously claim such a diversity of political opinion. The book's authors encompass a wide range of political perspectives, from Robert Kagan's neo-conservatism to Stephen Van Evera's defensive realism.

For all the range of opinion, however, the contributors find commonalities. As the book's title indicates, all the authors agree with the necessity for American leadership. All agree that the United States should maintain its military dominance. All agree, furthermore, on the benefits of an open economic order. There is also consensus on the need for the United States to embrace multilateralism. Finally, unanimity is present among the contributors on the desirability of improved democracy and human rights abroad.

Agreement ends there. MIT political scientist Stephen Van Evera, in the book's most specific, persuasive chapter, identifies nuclear-armed terrorists as the greatest threat to the United States (p. 11). Global warming and epidemic diseases are other potential threats he names. With these three problems posing dangers to the world, Van Evera calls for a "Concert of Cooperation" among the great powers, along the lines of the Concert of Europe established in 1815 (pp. 16–17). He writes that cooperation with China should be a primary goal of American foreign policy (p. 18), and that "the main threat to the United States is no longer conquest but war itself" (p. 4). Van Evera contends that the main impediments to this grand strategy are foreign lobbies and the defense establishment (p. 25).

Robert Kagan disagrees. For Kagan, a columnist at the *Washington Post* and Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International

Peace, the spread of autocracy is the chief menace to the Nation. Undemocratic powers Russia and China are pursuing regional predominance and encouraging the spread of autocracy to protect themselves (p. 48). It follows that the United States should form democratic coalitions, and spread democracy, to push back against the Sino-Russian offensive (p. 53). Kagan is thought-provoking and provocative, but ultimately he starkly overemphasizes the dangers of Russia and China and consequently overstates the need for U.S. power projection.

G. John Ikenberry, Francis Fukuyama, Samantha Power, and James Kurth also offer intriguing, if ultimately less persuasive, ideas. Not one of the 10 contributions is unoriginal, nor is any ludicrous. Perhaps the most frustrating contributor is Niall Ferguson, who spends most of his chapter ruining the public's ignorance of the statesman's dilemmas, only to hastily declare near his conclusion that a new President should jettison the assumption that the biggest threat to the U.S. is nuclear-armed terrorists (p. 242). He identifies four alternative dangers, among them the Middle East's disintegration, as more important. Given the provocative nature of this claim, it would have helped if he had elaborated on it. Instead, he simply says that "we must take very seriously the risk that the Greater Middle East could become in our time what Eastern Europe was in the 1940s or Central Africa in the 1990s: a lethal zone of conflict." The wars in 1990s Central Africa were horrid, but they were not a major threat to the United States. If the Middle East now poses as little a threat to the United States as Africa did, we are in for a peaceful future.

To Lead the World benefits from its contributors' varied backgrounds. Stanford University historian David M. Kennedy offers one of the best chapters, the historically informed "Two Concepts of Sovereignty." Kennedy roots the U.S. interventionist streak in its messianic birth: "When Britain's North American colonies struck for their independence in 1776 they at once invoked Westphalian principles and bid them defiance" (p. 159). America's respect for self-determination has led to great successes, but its moralistic streak leads it to crusades. Kennedy also places great importance on the so-called revolution in military affairs, believing that devastating force wielded by an all-volunteer army divorced from the mass public tempts policymakers into unnecessary wars (pp. 169–176).

Books such as this have an expiration date. With international events changing rapidly, foreign policy assessments in general become obsolete as quickly as computer software programs. The lack of a narrative puts edited volumes in particular at risk of being overrun by the train of time. But before *To Lead the World's* time is up, international relations students and policymakers would do well to read its contents and consider its recommendations. **JFQ**

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