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The new “National Security Strategy of the United States of America”

Introduction

This article discusses the various perceptions that have influenced American foreign policy during the post-Cold War period, focusing particularly on the ideology of the present George W. Bush administration.

Since the early 1990s American foreign policy has been shaped by three different views, which may be described as Wilsonian, realist and Jacksonian. The present administration is an adherent of the last of these three traditions. The so-called neoconservatives, who include all the leading names in this government, constitute a powerful faction within the Republican Party that seeks to strengthen and maintain American supremacy in the 21st century. What is disquieting here is not the ambition, but the means used to preserve the country's international ascendancy. American dominance is based on military superiority, which can only be preserved by preventing the emergence of any counterweight. Indeed, the present government is known for its insistence on acting alone and its indifference to international rules and organizations.

This is the framework for America's new “National Security Strategy”, which adopts a doctrine of prevention and pre-emptive action that allows American forces to act unilaterally and improperly to further the country's own self-serving national interests.

The men who govern America today are out of tune with her history. They are extremists, messianic fanatics, with an absolute faith in the “absolute good” that they represent and the “absolute evil” that is expressed in those who differ with them.

America is, happily, more than these people. She is a great country with deep democratic traditions and truly liberal men and women; but unfortunately she is at present under the sway of forces that thirst after the arrogance of power and blind fanaticism.

I. The three predominant trends that have shaped America's post-Cold War foreign policy

In the early years of the 1990s there were three predominant strands in American foreign policy¹. The first of these, which was introduced during the Clinton administration, is none other than the liberal idealism of Woodrow Wilson. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the nationalist “neo-isolationists” associated with Jacksonian tradition. Between the idealism of the Wilsonians and the nationalism of the Jacksonians lies the realist tradition associated with presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Richard Nixon.

a) Wilsonism

The Wilsonian world-view of the Clinton administration is reflected in the maximization of American hegemony in the international division of power. The collapse of the bipolar system and the transition of the former communist regimes to free market democracy paved the way for the consolidation of world peace and stability. The principles governing the Wilsonian perception in the light of the new world situation are:

- The spread of democracy, on the principle that democratic regimes do not fight one another.
- The spread of free trade, on the principle that economic interdependence creates close ties and co-operative frameworks that keep conflict at bay.
- Support for a collective perception of security through multilateral institutions of diplomacy, and pre-eminently the United Nations.

Popular support for Wilsonism in American society resides chiefly in the centre-left liberal classes².

b) Jacksonism

The Jacksonian tradition in its post-Cold War manifestation does not advocate, as vigorously as in the 1930s, the complete isolation of the United States, but supports the country's disengagement from its

1. For these three traditions – views see K. Arvanitopoulos, *American Foreign Policy after the Cold War: Ideological Currents*, Athens, Poiotita, 2001, pp. 13-68 (in Greek).

2. See Ch. Papasotiriou, “The problem of international security and the United Nations”, *EKOME*, Study M 975 (November 1997) (in Greek).

multilateral commitments, as these appeared under the Clinton administration. This tradition finds solid support in conservative circles and therefore among Republicans (particularly in Congress). The Jacksonians support the unilateral defence of American national interests all over the world and oppose American involvement in multilateral internationalist organizations for the utopian "good of mankind" or for the benefit of other nations³.

c) Realism

The "realpolitikers" are not opposed to multilateral commitments as such, but they do want such involvements to be guided by American national interests. They reject both Wilsonian idealism and Jacksonian nationalistic neo-isolationism, seeing "international politics in terms of general equilibrium and complex regional balances of power, and support American involvement in international developments based on management of the general equilibrium and regional balances of power"⁴.

This tradition has no strong popular base, for it draws mainly on European rather than American traditional views of international politics and international relations, but it does exercise considerable influence in centre-right political circles⁵.

American foreign policy during the 1990s oscillated between the Wilsonism of President Clinton and the Jacksonism of the Republican congressional majority after the 1994 elections. The present administration appears to be largely Jacksonian by temperament, although the realistic tradition seems to be represented in the government by Secretary of State Colin Powell who endeavours to moderate the Jacksonian predilection for unilateral initiatives and actions⁶. Up to a point, that is, for behind the "polite face" of foreign policy Bush "would simply

3. Walter Russell Mead, "The Jacksonian Tradition and American Foreign Policy", *The National Interest* 58 (Winter 1999/2000).

4. Ch. Papasotiriou, "The challenges of post-Cold War foreign policy in the United States", *EKOME 4* (2002) 6.

5. See J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2001.

6. Ch. Papasotiriou, "The challenges of post-Cold War foreign policy in the United States", *op.cit.*, p. 16.

display the sugar coating over a harsh policy of might. Powell was useful to everyone, because he appeared to be a theoretical partisan of international legitimacy and alliances with the international community. Tactically, however, Powell has been invaluable to Bush ...⁷”.

II. The leadership of President George W. Bush and its ideological colouring

The government led by George W. Bush stems from an élite with a “cynicism befitting this post-moral era, long accustomed to buying public opinion and public authorities both at home and abroad”⁸. The present regime also rests on the support of the Protestant fundamentalists, a set of fanatics who are persuaded that the USA plays a central role in the Biblical struggle between good and evil and are certain that their country has a moral duty to lead the world.

a) The props and stays of the present leadership

Let us start with the élite. It is not, of course, a recent phenomenon. This élite has grown up with the country and today embraces academics, bankers, journalists, lawyers, for the most part Protestants from the eastern seaboard and all serving “big capital”. And if they are divided on certain points, they are unanimous with regard to the importance of American dominance. The present government, however, fully understands one of the most fundamental aspects of capitalism: that is, the submission of the public sphere to the market. The associates of both Presidents Bush inhabit the world of arms dealing, financial services, petrochemicals and high technology. And the younger Bush has placed representatives of these spheres at the head of government institutions and federal departments⁹.

The present Bush administration flatters the country by constantly contrasting the hostility or indifference of the outside world to an American society that is upright and wholesome. Its displays of force are

7. G. Loulis, *The dangerous superpower. Bush's America and the war in Iraq*, Athens 2003, p. 45.

8. N. Birnbaum, “Aux racines du nationalisme américain”, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 2002, p. 3.

9. *Idem*.

therefore wrapped in religious terms, such as the distinction between "good" and "evil". These expressions come from the Christian right¹⁰, the conservative internationalists¹¹, the national security militarists¹², the neoconservatives¹³ and the social conservatives¹⁴.

There is no doubt that the reins of power in America are in the hands of one of the most fanatical and ideologically obsessed groups in the country's history. This present leadership is drawn largely from the ranks of the so-called neoconservatives, a group whose ranks include the "hawks", declared supporters of unilateral action in international affairs. Standing behind Bush, the men who direct government policy are Vice-President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Karl Rove (strategic adviser to the President) and Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Secretary of Defence). In the opposite camp are the more internationalist foreign policy "realists", led by Secretary of State Colin Powell and diplomats from the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the military top brass¹⁵.

10. Before the 1970s, American Evangelism was an underground movement that kept aloof from the political scene. But the rise of the neoconservatives encouraged the politicization of the evangelical movement as part of the new right-wing political activism.

11. Neoconservatives often use this term to distinguish themselves from the classical conservatives of the traditional isolationist persuasion and the liberal internationalists encountered chiefly within the ranks of the Democratic Party.

12. The militarists press for increasing military expenditure, and support American military supremacy. They ally themselves with the anti-Communist militarists of the broader American right wing, seeking a high strategic world supremacy based on unrivalled military strength in order to preserve the "Pax Americana" in the new century.

13. The neoconservatives played a major role in the establishment of the New Right from 1980 on. They are for the most part political analysts, active ideologues and academics rather than politicians, and they come from a variety of political territories. They believe in the moral superiority of the USA, which facilitates their alliance with the Christian right and other social conservatives. They are declared Internationalists, and have a powerful influence on the think tanks. They have succeeded in uniting the different strands of American conservatism, basing their efforts on the new challenge to American supremacy.

14. Their influence is largely restricted to domestic affairs and focuses principally on the defence of moral values. Their natural home is the traditional American conservative movement.

15. J. Lobe, "Debating Post-Saddam Policy: hardliners versus realpolitikers", *Foreign Policy in Focus*, December 2002, p. 85.

b) *The neoconservative vision: an American nationalism*

The neoconservatives, then, have succeeded in pulling together all the different strands of conservatism, giving Republican foreign policy a new vision. Their rhetoric has a revolutionary tenor that is entirely new. They believe in American superiority, and advance its principles through membership of think tanks¹⁶ and the publication of articles. They concentrate on foreign policy, since —given that they come from a variety of political territories, including the left— there is no consensus among them on domestic issues, and they reject the isolationism, characteristic of so much of the Republican Party.

Their doctrine is that of “war for peace”, for as Roosevelt himself once declared “no triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumph of war”¹⁷. For the neoconservatives, America’s true foreign policy is not that of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt but the conservative international interventionism of Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan. They therefore turn away from “realism” in international relations, maintaining that American foreign policy must have a “moral dimension” and not be based strictly on considerations of national interest, as the realists traditionally advocate. Beyond the “war on terrorism”, they promote “regime change” instead of a process of democratization. They rely upon American military supremacy¹⁸ and declare that their willingness to use it is the most important factor in preserving and promoting world peace to any satisfactory degree.

The rhetoric they use is characteristic of the conservative right, and the present leadership is following the same path as that of the Reagan administration. Then, the watchword was the “evil empire”; today, it is the “axis of evil”.

16. The best-known of the think tanks that promote neoconservative views are the: American Enterprise Institute, Hudson Institute, Heritage Foundation, Center For Security Policy and the now famous Project For the New American Century. This last is the focus of considerable interest, and many accuse it of being the real formulator of American foreign policy.

17. T. Barry, “PNAC’S Present Dangers As Blueprint For Bush Doctrine”, *Foreign Policy In Focus*, October 2000, p. 35.

18. One of President Bush’s first decisions in the wake of September 11th, 2001, was to increase defence spending for 2002 by 14% (48 billion dollars). See G. Loulis, *The dangerous superpower*, *op.cit.*, p. 52.

III. The new American military doctrine

Shortly after September 11th, 2001, it began to become apparent that Bush's America was changing course in its relations with the outside world. The new course was solitary, unilateralist and aggressive. The project for the New American Century, however, had already been conceived by Paul Wolfowitz and the neoconservatives long before this, as we shall see.

a) Towards implementation of the plan

The new national security strategy that is discussed in the following chapter is based on earlier studies drafted by neoconservative groups.

The first of these, written in 1992 by then Pentagon analysts Paul Wolfowitz (now Deputy Secretary of Defence) and I. Lewis Libby (now Vice-President Cheney's chief of staff), was entitled "Defense Policy Guide" (DPG). It advocated preventive military action in Eurasia to discourage any ambitions any other power might have in the region, and a policy of prevention against states suspected of developing weapons of mass destruction. It also advocated continuous American intervention without the involvement of the United Nations, which is not even mentioned in the report. When specific passages from this study were published, they created considerable disquiet and many began to speak of a strategy blatantly aimed at establishing a "Pax Americana".

The second document theorizing the new military doctrine was published in September 2000 by the Project For the New American Century, and was a strategic plan for how America should exercise her global dominion. It was entitled "Rebuilding America's Defenses", and makes it clear that America has a right to police the world and a duty to maintain its supremacy even if it has to use its military might to do so. Wolfowitz and Libby were part of the team that wrote this report, together with other members of the PNAC who today occupy key positions in the Bush administration. The focal points of the study include seven specific measures for shaping an imperial role for America in the 21st century.

— Implementation of four key priorities for America's armed forces, to ensure: the defence and protection of the American homeland; the military capability, preparedness and superiority of American armed

forces in multiple and complex theatres of operations around the globe; the continuous constabulary and military presence of the USA in critical regions of the world; and, finally, the perpetual adaptation of American forces with knowledge and application of new technologies to defence equipment.

- Preservation of America's nuclear dominance, which however will no longer be based on a balance of power between the USA and Russia, but on threats from rogue states.
- Increasing America's active military strength from 1,400,000 to 1,600,000.
- Continual modernization of the armed forces, with heavy investment in new weapons' systems.
- Creation and development of missile and defence systems to protect America and her allies.
- Control of space and creation of space-based military forces.
- Increasing military spending from 3.5% to 3.8% of GDP, that is, from 15 billion to 20 billion dollars a year.

The same document also advocates expanding America's "security perimeter" by creating new bases to defend such key regions as Europe, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

America's new strategic doctrine, in other words, did not appear suddenly as a result of the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001. That event merely flung wide the doors for acceptance of this "revolutionary" strategy.

b) The new doctrine of preventive self-defence

The famous "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" was announced on 20 September 2002. The critical paragraph is the now familiar: "The greater the threat [from rogue states], the greater is the risk of inaction —and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively". America, in other words, distancing herself from the rules of the international community (and particularly the United Nations Security Council), will judge and decide (by her own criteria) who constitutes or could constitute a threat to her and will attack first, pre-

emptively, considering this attack as "defensive" and the (supposed) intentions of the other side as "aggression". The ways and means proposed for the achievement of specific objectives create concern and raise justified questions. What are the "threats" that will provoke a preventive strike to "defend" a nation? Can a country conceivably attack another on the mere pretext of the indeterminate "plans" of its adversary? And what kind of international legitimacy can there be when a state decides to attack another first, describing this aggression as merely "taking the fight into the enemy's camp"?

The enemies that emerge in the new doctrine are a mixture of terrorists and tyrants. The events of September 11th revealed a new reality. America is threatened by "shadowy networks that can bring chaos and suffering ...". Terrorism is cited as the fundamental threat and "no distinction" is made between terrorists and the states that harbour or aid them.

The concept of "pre-emption" means that an attacker alleges that the victim of his attack has, supposedly, "evil intentions", "aggressive designs" and that, if not struck down early, will constitute a "threat" in the future. By this logic any threat to a country, which ought to be visible and tangible, is now metamorphosed into the arbitrary assessment of a superpower that decides when to make its "pre-emptive strike". The evaluation and weighing of threats by the international community, which has traditionally followed international rules and the practices of decades, has vanished. Gone is the role of the United Nations and of the Security Council, which is supposed to be the sole body competent to "determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression" in order to "decide what measures shall be taken ... and take action by air, sea or land forces". According to this new strategy, preventive military action is essential. The USA cannot wait for the "enemy" to strike first, especially in the case of terrorists and trouble-makers. This role can now, if in her judgement this is expedient, be assumed by America, acting alone, without the approval of the international community, against any specific country, "pre-emptively".

Pre-emption, in other words, has been raised to a new level in American foreign policy. Military preventive action should no longer be limited to circumstances of direct (visible) threat, as required by

international law, but should be extended to entitle the USA to defend its interests even when there is no certainty as to the time or place of the presumed aggression. The novelty of “pre-emptive action” lies in the fact that it includes preventive warfare, in which violence can be used, without proof of imminent attack, to ward off a serious threat to the USA.

This preventive military action requires hegemony. The tenor of the entire document makes it clear that the USA has to ensure the supremacy of its forces, warding off any hostile act against the country or any attempt to seek equipoise. In other words, “the United States enjoys a position of unrivalled military strength” and intends to maintain it. It stresses that the USA will not permit any so-called “equalling”, that is, an equilibrium of strength, making it clear that its hegemonic policy will continue and that this role is essentially undermined by allied powers.

The document also stresses the need to promote freedom and independence. Poverty, it claims, is a moral and military challenge. But it nowhere suggests how these objectives might be pursued and achieved.

The content of the National Security Strategy is structured around the three objectives of defending, preserving and extending democracy. With regard to the first two, the NSS observes that today the world’s great powers find themselves united by the common dangers of terrorist violence and chaos. They must therefore “compete in peace instead of continually preparing for war”. It mentions the roles of China and Russia, which found themselves on the same wavelength as the USA after the tragic events of September 11th.

Russia, it notes, is no longer a strategic rival, and its leaders have “realized that Cold War tactics are not in its national interest”. China, although characterized as a strategic rival by the American government, is presented as a power that is taking some of the right steps, such as joining the World Trade Organization, and whose rapidly developing economy makes closer cooperation possible. Finally, with regard to the third objective, the NSS states that extending democratic freedom and economic openness to every corner of the planet is a strategic and moral duty. The Bush administration appears to encourage the development of free markets and to promote free trade. The NSS even states that “freedom and the development of democratic institutions [are] key themes in our bilateral relations”. It stresses that American foreign aid

will be increased by 50% over the next three years to assist nations that "govern justly, invest in their people and encourage economic freedom".

Conclusions

In this article we have attempted to outline the philosophy governing American action in the foreign policy sector since the beginning of the 1990s. It was the announcement of the National Security Strategy that aroused the most intense concern and interest within the international community, chiefly because of the weight given to the doctrine of preventive action. To what extent, however, is this concern justified?

Preventive action based on imminent or immediate threat is recognized by international law and mentioned in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations Organization. Consequently, the concept of prevention is nothing new on the international stage and has been used from time to time in the service of various interests. The difficulty in the matter is the extent to which a state is acting within the framework of the right of self-defence, as provided by the Charter of the United Nations Organization, and whether it is indeed facing an immediate threat. One classic and dangerous example is that of Israel, when in 1981 it sent fighter planes to destroy a nuclear reactor in Iraq, describing this attack as an act of pre-emptive self-defence. The Security Council passed a resolution unanimously condemning Israel for this crude and illegal action.

The traditional concept of immediate threat as we have understood it until now had to do with the adversary's preparations for war, and was visible in the movement of troops and naval vessels and intensive military activity. The risk of direct threat, however, no longer comes from such movements. In the NSS President Bush, while describing the new situation and the new dangers in some detail, is unable to give a clear sense of direct threat, while the result is further hampered by the fuzziness of the concept of pre-emption.

The disquiet aroused in the international community by the new defence strategy stems, firstly, from the objective difficulty inherent in the exercise of a doctrine of pre-emption, which de facto cannot be generalized as a solution, and, secondly, from the known willingness of

the Bush administration to act alone, disregarding the international organizations and its own allies. In a world of “pre-emptive strikes”, violence would become uncontrolled, especially on the part of the powerful who, whether wanting to prevent their adversaries from growing stronger or simply in the name of “prevention”, seek to promote their interests by force (like the USA in Iraq).