

American Foreign Policy After the 2008 Elections

Henry R. Nau
Professor of Political Science and International Affairs
Elliott School of International Affairs
The George Washington University

Lecture at RIETI, Tokyo, Japan, January 9, 2008

Broad Tendency to Cycle

- Isolationist: 18th/19th Centuries (Washington)
- Internationalist: League of Nations (Wilson)
- Isolationist: between WWI and WWII (Hoover)
- Internationalist: United Nations then Cold War (FDR, Truman)
- Isolationist: after Vietnam (Carter)
- Internationalist: under Reagan, Bush I and Clinton
- Nationalist/ Unilateralist: under first term Bush II
- Internationalist: under second term Bush II
- After Bush II? More Modesty/ Pull Back?

Traditions in American Foreign Policy

- Limited Ambitions (primarily defense)
 - Nationalist (Jackson, Bush II)
 - Realist – Two Kinds
 - Defensive (Alliances: Hamilton, Nixon)
 - Offensive (Imperialism: TR)
- Greater Ambitions (spreading democracy)
 - Neo-Conservatives (Reagan)
 - Liberal Internationalists (Wilson, FDR, Clinton)

Nationalist Tradition

- Main Tenets
 - Limit defense to western hemisphere (missile defense). Expect others to defend themselves (no need for allies)
 - Skeptical of UN, trade, nation-building and even allies
 - React fiercely/unilaterally to attack and insist on military victory
 - But then return home to wait for next attack – no emphasis on broader diplomacy or nation-building
- Standard Bearers Today
 - Ron Paul, Pat Buchanan, Huckabee?
 - CATO Institute

Defensive Realist Tradition

- Main Tenets
 - More aggressive defense posture – prevent hegemony in other hemispheres
 - Balance power by alliances and containment (Iraq, now Iran)
 - Expect counterbalancing – China, Russia, etc.
 - Seek stability and world order through great power concert (UN Security Council), not democracy or regime change
- Standard Bearers Today
 - Scowcroft, Bush I, Powell, Huntington, Richardson? McCain?
 - Nixon Center, Stimson Center

Offensive Realist Tradition

- Main Tenets
 - Imperialist defense policy – seek hegemony for US, not just prevent others from gaining it
 - After CW US is hegemon. Preempt challengers. Power not democracy is key. Lead but don't depend on allies (coalitions of willing).
 - Two options
 - Forward strategy – land bases worldwide (Iraq)
 - Off shore strategy – strong navy and air force (Persian Gulf)
- Standard Bearers Today
 - Pentagon
 - Cheney, Rumsfeld, Mearsheimer
 - Giuliani?

Neo-Conservative Tradition

- Main Tenets
 - Spread democracy (noble purpose) not just seek stability or hegemony.
 - Use military force to oppose oppression (axis of evil) and support freedom. Substitute for diplomacy which risks surrender
 - Rely on key democracies (Britain) not alliances (NATO) or great power concert (UN)
 - Local leaders will do nation-building
- Standard Bearers Today
 - Kristol-Kagan, Weekly Standard
 - Wall Street Journal
 - American Enterprise Institute
 - Romney? McCain?

Liberal International Tradition

- Main Tenets
 - Spread democracy by collective security and reducing the role of military power
 - Accept equality of all countries even if they are not free
 - build international institutions to resolve disputes diplomatically
 - Talk especially to enemies and compromise
- Standard Bearers Today
 - Clinton (Bill and Hillary)? Obama? Edwards?
 - Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
 - Washington Post, NY Times

Current Debate

- Neo-Cons Out (especially if terrorist threat recedes, as with success of military surge in Iraq)
 - Democracy is a “bridge too far”
 - Use of force only increases terrorism
 - Exaggerate terrorist threat (Iraq)
 - Unilateralist and arrogant – destroys US credibility
- Realists (R) and Liberal Internationalists (LI) In
 - Security (R) or diplomacy (LI) first, not democracy
 - Act multilaterally through alliances (R) or IOs (LI)
 - Reduce or reposition (over the horizon) US military presence abroad
 - Call upon allies to do more (R and LI)

Analyzing Bush II

- Bush Made Nationalist and Neo-Con Mistakes
 - Reacted too fiercely to attack – “bring ‘em on” (rejected NATO Article V)
 - No follow-up to victory when strongest. “Mission Accomplished”? Assumed force substituted for diplomacy, international and domestic
- But Use of Force Was Not a Mistake. Avoided Realist and Liberal Internationalist Mistakes
 - Realist use of force obsolete – can’t deter terrorism by containment
 - LI reluctance to use force dangerous (done in 1990s)

How To Avoid Cycling: A Conservative Internationalist Tradition

- Maintain aggressive use of force (expand armed forces) but step up diplomacy when power at peak (ME peace initiative, NK 6 Party Talks, Iran, etc.). Sustains domestic support.
- Pursue democracy at borders of, not beyond, free world (ink blot approach, not bridges too far). Sustains international support.
 - Turkey more important than Iraq
 - Pakistan more important than Afghanistan
 - South Korea and Taiwan more important than China
 - Ukraine more important than Russia

Which Candidate is the Conservative Internationalist (CI)?

- Democrats
 - Is Hillary tougher than Bill on terrorists?
 - Is Obama, who opposed the Iraq war, as tough as Hillary?
 - Is Edwards an economic nationalist?
- Republicans
 - Is McCain, strong on military force and democracy (League of Democracies), the true CI candidate?
 - Is Giuliani a one issue (terrorism) candidate?
 - Is Huckabee too nationalist?
 - Is Romney too LI?