

Will the United States Withdraw from Iraq and Leave Japan Out to Dry?

By Henry R. Nau

WILL the United States eventually withdraw from Iraq, the way it did from Vietnam? If so, where does that leave Japan, which supported the occupying coalition led by the United States and deployed the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) for the first time beyond its territorial waters to a Middle East country torn apart by daily violence?

In my latest book, recently translated and published in Japanese by Yuhikaku Press, I explain that the US historically tends to cycle between ambitious internationalist plans to spread democratic reforms abroad and more limited nationalist instincts to withdraw and defend America from the Western Hemisphere. This tendency may be repeating itself today in Iraq. Attacked on September 11, 2001, the US retaliated fiercely to overthrow the Taliban government in Afghanistan that trained the September 11th hijackers. It then widened the war to invade Iraq, which had ties to global (Al Qaeda) terrorists, although it had no direct involvement in September 11, and was suspected of acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Winning both military conflicts decisively, America launched ambitious political plans to bring democracy to South Asia and the Middle East.

Today those efforts, supported by Japan, confront growing costs in both human lives and resources. In spring 2006, prominent Americans in Congress called for immediate or early US withdrawal from Iraq. From aggressive response to attack, to ambitious programs to democratize defeated adversaries, to unwillingness to sustain costly foreign policy engagements, America cycles between internationalist and nationalist tendencies and, as the English title of my book suggests, never feels "at home abroad."

Cycling characterized US foreign policy after World War I (isolationism), World War II (rapid demobilization), and at times during the Cold War (Vietnam). Why does it persist? The answer, my book argues, lies in the US identity. America is schizophrenic, torn right down between nationalists, who advocate modest foreign policies, and internationalists, who have more ambitious goals.

Nationalists include Jacksonians (after President Andrew Jackson) and Hamiltonians (after the first Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton). Jacksonians emphasize the US uniqueness and a defense strategy limited to the Western Hemisphere. Hamiltonians see America as an ordinary power and seek stability in Europe and Asia through a balance of power but not the spread of democracy.

Internationalists include Jeffersonians (after President

Thomas Jefferson) and Wilsonians (after President Woodrow Wilson). Jeffersonians emphasize the US exceptionalism and freedom as an example for other nations but not as something that can be imposed by force. Wilsonians stress the US ideals of equality and inclusiveness and look to international institutions and law to spread democracy.

These four foreign policy traditions are deeply embedded in America's DNA. They reemerge each time the country faces new dangers.

In the absence of threat, the default position for American foreign policy is the Jacksonian or defensive nationalist tradition. This focuses on defense of the Western Hemisphere and rejects American imperialism. It exploits the unique geopolitical situation of the United States as the only great power surrounded by two wide oceans facing no great power rival (like Russia in Europe or China in Asia) or conflict (like the Middle East or Taiwan) in its hemisphere. Jacksonians ask, as George Washington did in his famous farewell address: "Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground?"

Compared to other recent presidents, George W. Bush draws deeply from this Jacksonian tradition (as do frontier states in general such as his adopted Texas). When he came into office before September 11, he called for a "more humble foreign policy" and initiated a series of changes in US foreign policy to reduce US involvement outside the western hemisphere – transforming military strategy from large land bases in Europe and Asia to more mobile army and air contingents based on the high seas; emphasizing hemispheric issues such as Mexico, immigration policy and the Free Trade Area of the Americas; pulling back from ambitious and solo diplomatic roles in the Middle East, North Korea and Northern Ireland; opposing nation-building in places like the Balkans and developing countries; and emphasizing the responsibilities of other great powers such as Russia, China and the EU.

Bush's early instincts are important because war changed his foreign policy but not his DNA. His DNA does not want to be involved in nation-building. Attacked by terrorists, however, he retaliated furiously and unilaterally, as Jacksonians are prone to do. In Afghanistan, he did not ask for or accept the UN and NATO help, much as President Jackson retaliated against Indian raids in the Florida Territory in 1818, crossing US borders without authorization from either Congress or President James Monroe. Other domestic traditions rallied to Bush's support, as

they do when America is attacked. Allies also backed the United States. Europe offered assistance under Article V of the NATO Treaty, which the United States declined, and Japan dispatched maritime SDF contingents to the Indian Ocean in an unprecedented display of solidarity and support.

But then Bush split the domestic and international consensus by attacking Iraq. Going into Iraq without the UN or even NATO approval was too much for Wilsonian internationalists. In the presidential election of 2004, Wilsonian Democrat John Kerry argued that international agreement was necessary before America could use force legitimately, even though Kerry still opposed the use of force against Iraq in 1991 after the United States approved it. Some Hamiltonians or realists, such as former national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, also jumped ship. They preferred to contain Iraq, even though a massive projection of United States and British forces into the Persian Gulf was necessary to get UN inspectors back into Iraq to monitor its weapons programs. Even some Jacksonians (for example, the conservative Washington think tank, the CATO Institute) opposed the invasion of Iraq, arguing that measures closer to home such as homeland and missile defense could best defeat terrorism. The discovery that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction, although it had some capabilities to that effect, only deepened these divisions among American foreign policy traditions.

Bush reacted by drawing on another part of his DNA. A transplant from Connecticut to Texas, Bush still shared his family's Jeffersonian attachment to American ideals, especially freedom. For him, unlike pure Jacksonians, it was not enough to use power just to defend a piece of territory; it had to be used for higher purposes. Even before Iraq, Bush spoke of a "balance of power that tilted toward freedom." After Iraq, freedom took center stage.

This emphasis on freedom was partly due to necessity. US military victories destroyed the regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. Those regimes had to be rebuilt. It made no sense to allow the Taliban or Baathists to return to power. And Bush could not shore up fragmenting domestic support by cynically reinstalling authoritarian governments in these countries. He had to promote democracy. But the emphasis on freedom was also a matter of his Jeffersonian instincts. Bush disdains authoritarian governments. Before Iraq he frequently cited the atrocities of Saddam Hussein, told interlocutors that he "loathed" tyrants such as Kim Jong Il in North Korea, and called for reform of corrupt organizations such as the Palestinian Authority under Yasser Arafat.

Thus it was not that much of a stretch for Bush after Iraq to sound the tocsin for freedom. In his inaugural address in January 2005 he mentioned freedom 27 times and repeated it 21 times more in his State of the Union message. Elections in Iraq and the death of Yasser Arafat confirmed the opportunity to spread reforms. This prospect rallied some Wilsonians back to Bush's side. Although opposed to the invasion, they found it hard to reject

the courage of millions of Iraqis voting three times in national elections in 2005 despite death threats from insurgents.

Nevertheless, Wilsonians conditioned their support on a larger role for international institutions such as NATO and the UN. Bush, however, had little use for a corrupt UN caught up in the oil-for-food scandal. He also scoffed at indecisive European allies ready to use anti-American sentiments to stay in office. He preferred a vaguer Jeffersonian appeal to freedom. People had to choose democracy; as he said in his inaugural address. And, when they did, the result might not look like freedom in the US. Jeffersonians prefer competition among democratic states, not cooperation under global institutions that include non-democratic states.

The appeal to freedom, however, alienated Hamiltonians or realists. They deplored the loss of American lives to pursue delusions of democracy in the Middle East. Their lodestar is stability, not freedom, and they noted immediately that Bush did not mention stability once in either his inaugural or State of the Union speeches. Instead, Bush and his Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice repeatedly criticized the fact that for decades the United States had pursued stability in the Middle East at the expense of freedom and achieved neither. Now it would pursue liberty and eventually achieve the stability of a democratic peace in the Middle East. For realists, that was too much. The Nixon Center, a realist think tank, expelled Wilsonians or neo-conservatives from the editorial board of its journal, *The National Interest*. Neo-conservatives immediately started their own journal, *The American Interest*. They would stress American interests, not the national interests of Hamiltonian realists or the universal interests of Wilsonian internationalists.

Patterns of cycling are thus apparent once again in UN foreign policy. Will this cycling come full circle and end in the United States withdrawal from the Middle East and South Asia? Will Iraq become another Vietnam? Or will the United States hold out with a strategy of reform and democratization in the Middle East as it did in Europe and Japan during the Cold War?

The outcome in Iraq is unknown, but America is already shaping a less ambitious, more sustainable strategy for the world after Iraq. The Pentagon's military transformation projects lighter and temporary forces to fight terrorism around the periphery of Asia, Africa and Europe. This strategy requires continued military cooperation from sea-based allies, such as Great Britain and Japan, but not from land-based powers such as France, Germany, Russia or China. Thus Japan becomes more important to the United States as the United States redeploys its forces to more sustainable positions. Both countries have histories of being isolated from the rest of the world. Maybe, by working together, the two countries can overcome their traditional discomfort in international affairs and achieve a mutual sense of being more "at home abroad." **JS**

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