

The Critical Role of the US in Global Governance

The United States . . . is the heir of a Western civilization which has long been preoccupied with the art and science of government. If the United States does not take the initiative, no one will.

—Albert Einstein

The US was most powerful at its founding, long before it had great armies and vast wealth. Its power came from the profound ideas it carried to the world: constitutional democracy, freedom of speech and religion, federalism, separation of church and state, and a system of checks and balances on power. By institutionalizing these ideas in the American constitution, the founders created the momentum that eventually laid waste to monarchies and tyranny throughout the world, creating the democratic age in which we now live. And many of these same concepts of governance will survive to become the cornerstones of the coming global constitution.

But America's role in the world has changed after two centuries. Tragically, it is now a widely held view around the world that our vast economic and military power has turned the US into a corrupt and self-serving superpower. International polls confirm that people throughout the world,

and especially sizeable majorities in many European countries, believe that what the US now brings to the world is often not to the world's benefit. Especially under the current Bush regime, America has given lip service to diplomacy, cooperation, and international law—but in practice embraces unilateralism and the concept of might makes right over the rule of law.

While it advocates ridding the world of the threat of WMDs, the United States actually possesses more weapons of mass destruction than any other country and maintains the largest military force in the world.¹ It has spent over \$14 trillion on its military forces since World War II, thereby generating a vast, self-serving, military-industrial-intelligence complex, and the massive Pentagon bureaucracy that manages it.² The US share of worldwide defense spending is about 40 percent—and that equals the next nine countries combined.³

It was the philosopher Nietzsche who once said, “When all you have is a hammer, your problems look like nails.” America's hammer is its military might. The US under the Bush administration treats far too many complex global problems as if they are nails that need to be hammered with brute force instead of diplomacy. At this moment in history, America has bought into the war system more than any other major power, becoming its major upholder in the world. Sadly, this attitude probably makes America the greatest obstacle to the realization of a democratic world government—which is the only long-term cure for the war system that has resulted from the chaos of unlimited national sovereignty.

Let's look for a moment at the wide expanse of the American empire: The US Special Operations Forces, for just one example, are involved in military training, antinarcotics

programs, antiterrorist activities, and equipment transfers, and are deployed in more than 140 countries with a budget of over \$3 billion.⁴ The US has regular troops stationed in every corner of the globe and at this moment is fighting two wars in the world's most volatile region.

While it speaks in high tones of "spreading liberty," America actually pursues a Machiavellian foreign policy, in effect saying, "We don't care if they hate us, as long as they fear us." Ironically, this hatred of America has now become the gravest threat to US citizens, especially in the way that our aggressive behavior in the Middle East and our support for Israel and Saudi Arabia has inflamed radical Islamists.

One of the reasons America is detested in some parts of the world is its policy of supporting dictators that favor US interests over the interests of the people who have to live under these brutal regimes. In some cases, the US has done even worse than merely support dictators—it actually *installed* them in the first place, sometimes replacing democratic regimes with tyrannical ones that favored US interests. The US helped overthrow the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende, a socialist in Chile, and replaced him with the brutal dictatorship of General Pinochet. The CIA played a decisive role in overthrowing Iran's democratically elected president in 1953, installing the Shah of Iran as ruler, and staunchly supported his repressive regime. In the late 1980s the US supported and armed Iraq's Saddam Hussein in his war with Iran. When Iraq was losing, the US sold Saddam chemical weapons, which he used against Iran's troops as well as against Iraqi Kurds. And there are many other cases of similar conduct on virtually every continent.

The US currently props up the Saudi royal family who rules Saudi Arabia, one of the world's most notoriously

repressive and undemocratic regimes. There is an unholy alliance between America, the world's largest consumer of oil, and Saudi Arabia, the world's largest producer of oil, some of it brokered by the Bush family itself. While proclaiming the need for democratic values in the Middle East, America remains silent about a country where women cannot drive cars, only one religion is allowed, public beheadings take place, and dissent is not tolerated.

We could enumerate other examples of US manipulation of governments around the world, but authors like Noam Chomsky have already provided the full description. The simple moral of the story is this: The country that first brought democratic ideals to the world should actually be *supporting these ideals* around the world. Aside from working for enforceable global law, perhaps the best way the US could support the evolution of democracy overseas is by helping countries pull themselves out of poverty. But the US only gives about \$13 billion yearly in total development aid worldwide. Of that amount, \$3 billion goes to Israel and \$2 billion to Egypt as part of the payoff for the 1979 peace deal between those two countries, leaving only about \$8 billion for the rest of the world.⁵ As we previously noted, this is a pittance compared to US military expenditure. America gives the least amount of development aid as a percentage of its gross national product of any industrialized country, and the Department of Defense has a budget fifteen times that of the Department of State. The fact that the US is constantly behind in paying its UN dues is a reflection of American priorities. At the end of August 2003, members owed the UN \$2.3 billion, of which the United States alone owed \$1.2 billion.

Nearly fifteen years after end of the Cold War, the US has not yet produced a sensible strategy in international relations.

Despite having the greatest military machine in the world and thousands of nuclear weapons, it was unable to protect US citizens against the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. America has now reached a point where it is spending untold billions of dollars on military forces that actually have the effect of making its citizens, and the rest of the world, less safe.

America is currently not ready to lead the world

America has always been a deeply individualistic society. It is the most competitive and capitalistic of the developed Western nations. It is the only developed country that allows the death penalty and the only one lacking a national health plan. It has the highest rate of infant mortality, the highest murder rate, and the most homeless people. No democratic country in the world has a higher percentage of its population in prison. These are not appropriate “leadership” characteristics for a country that is the world’s sole superpower. It is clear that drastic reforms are needed in the US, both domestically and in foreign policy, before it is in a position to lead the world into the era of a democratic world government with a strong emphasis on human rights!

The US is also vulnerable economically. For example, when it comes to petroleum consumption, America is the world’s biggest glutton: Though it has only 5 percent of the world’s population, it consumes 25 percent of the world’s oil.⁶ US domestic oil production peaked in 1970 and has been in decline ever since.⁷ Oil imports supplied 57 percent of US needs in 2001, compared to 47 percent a decade earlier and only 36 percent in 1981.⁸ Oil is America’s Achilles’ heel. The US is a mighty giant with an addiction and a strategic weakness. With oil supply about to peak and the last great

reserves sitting under the sands of the Persian Gulf, it is no wonder that America is aggressively and illegally defending its vital interests in this area.

America's foreign policy reflects its fundamental individualism through the unilateralist foreign policies of both Democratic and Republican administrations. In 1983 President Reagan invaded Grenada, and he bombed Libya in 1986. Both were violations of international law. In 1986, the US was condemned in the World Court for unlawful use of force when it mined Nicaraguan harbors; it ignored the court's judgment. In 1989, the first President Bush invaded Panama, causing approximately 300 civilian deaths, in violation of international law; the US then vetoed a resolution condemning the US action in the UN Security Council.⁹ In 1998, President Clinton launched cruise missiles against Iraq in violation of international law. And in 2003, the second President Bush invaded Iraq as a preemptive measure against a perceived threat of WMDs, ignoring the clearly stated opposition of the world community. The claim that Saddam Hussein had WMDs was later disproved.

Such examples of unilateralism show why the US is a major obstacle to the development of global law. America appears to believe in a double standard: It expects other countries to abide by international law, but it currently views itself as being above such laws. The concept of law in a democracy is based on reciprocity—the notion that laws must be applied equally to all parties. In a global context, this means that the same rules would apply everywhere in the world without exception. If the world bans nuclear weapons, then no country or group can legally possess them. If global government abolishes war, then nations will have to settle disputes in the world legislature or through the courts. A global government

would mandate equal enforcement of global law for all nations, strong or weak.

It is ironic that the US proposed the creation of the League of Nations after WWI and later the creation of the UN at the end of WWII. Even the development of the international Criminal Court began as a US proposal. Yet, in recent times these international institutions have floundered due to a lack of American support.

With the World Federalist Movement in the lead as the convener of a powerful NGO coalition, the United States initially supported the development of the ICC and signed the Rome Statute in 1998 under the Clinton administration. But sadly, on May 6, 2002, the George W. Bush administration nullified this signature, *the first time any country had unsigned a UN treaty*. The Bush administration said it feared an entanglement that could someday be used against the US. Evidently, Bush was more concerned with maintaining maximum power than with promoting international law and human rights.

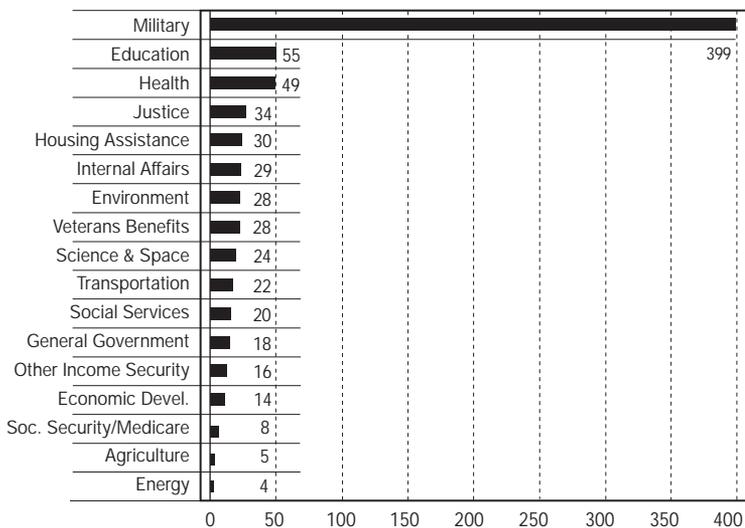
The US under the Bush administration has continued to dispute or has failed to endorse other antiwar measures. Amazingly, it voted against the land mine treaty ratified by over 130 nations. This treaty was initiated by an American veteran of the Vietnam War who wanted to end the horror of these devices that indiscriminately kill or maim people, long after wars are over.

The US has made little effort in recent years to end nuclear proliferation. It has violated the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty as well as the Outer Space Treaty. America has not ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty because it wants to develop a tactical mini-nuclear weapon to be used as a bunker-busting bomb. This blurring of the line between nuclear and conventional weapons is a dangerous

direction in which to head; it increases the likelihood that nuclear weapons will be used since they will be more like conventional weapons.

The US defense budget consumes roughly half of the US discretionary budget, leaving little money for health care and education. Half of all American scientists and engineers work on military matters. This waste of resources staggers the imagination. This behavior is not a valid defense of a country—it is an offense to the world.

US Fiscal Year 2004 Discretionary Budget Request
(\$ in Billions)



Source: Center for Defense Information, CDI.org

The current American administration is obviously not going to lead the world into global governance. But the proposition of this book is that American citizens, in part by harkening back to the ideas of the founders of our republic, *can* become a critical part of the movement for world democracy.

The world community is standing up to the US

The US militarily dominates the world as the last superpower, but its unilateralist foreign policy is beginning to be challenged by the rest of the world. The best example of this was the early 2003 struggle within the UN Security Council over the US claim that an immediate preemptive invasion of Iraq was needed. The US was forced to argue its case before the UN because, according to the UN Charter, only the Security Council can authorize war. But the Security Council refused to approve the invasion of Iraq.

America's traditional allies France and Germany were especially opposed to the plan to invade. Russia and the Arab League refused support as well. The Bush administration forced an unprecedented split in world opinion that not only pitted the US against its closest allies, but threatened the credibility of the UN itself.

The unilateral invasion of Iraq by Britain and America without UN approval violated the UN Charter, international law, and the US Constitution. The US Constitution states that the US must abide by any treaty ratified by the US Congress. The most important of all such treaties is the UN Charter, which states that no member country shall make war against the government of another country unless it is acting in self-defense. The hubris implied in this unilateral action against Iraq has created new enemies for the United States.

The pretext for the invasion of Iraq was the country's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. After finding no weapons of mass destruction, the US and Britain tried to justify the war by stating it was a humanitarian act to remove a brutal dictator. There is, of course, no disputing the fact that Saddam Hussein was a murderous dictator, but for

the US and Britain to appoint themselves accuser, judge, jury, and executioner rather than to use and further develop international law is unacceptable. There are many brutal dictators in the world who are ignored because they don't happen to sit on the world's second largest oil reserve.

The fact that the UN would not give its stamp of approval for this invasion was a major victory for the law-abiding countries of the world. Hopefully, the US-British action represented a last gasp of superpower unilateralism in an interdependent world looking for peaceful means to solve disputes and spread democracy. As international law evolves into enforceable global law under a world constitution, the world will respond to genocide, human rights abuse, and tyrants with a single democratic voice and a coordinated military response, with the burden shared by the world as a whole.

The US is currently an obstacle to global environmental protection

The process begun by a UN General Assembly resolution on climate change in 1988 was finalized as a landmark treaty in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan. We noted in an earlier chapter that the Kyoto Protocol, as it has become known, limits the greenhouse gases that countries can produce to 5 percent below 1990 levels. This is to be achieved by developed countries cutting production and giving financial aid to developing countries so that they can cut production of these gases as well. President Clinton agreed to the treaty but his policy, as we have noted, was reversed by President George W. Bush.

The Kyoto Protocol is not perfect—the burden of reducing emissions is not placed equally on all countries—but it is a big first step in a long battle to stop global warming. The European nations had all readily agreed to Kyoto, and they

were shocked by President Bush's reluctance to even acknowledge the problem of global warming. Bush nonetheless asserted that the US lifestyle was "not up for negotiation."

We noted earlier that America consumes 25 percent of the world's oil.¹⁰ As the largest consumer of fossil fuel and the largest producer of greenhouse gases, the US has become a pariah in its refusal to sign this important treaty that has been ratified by 120 countries.

Even though the US Environmental Protection Agency has confirmed that global warming is taking place, President Bush dismissed its report as the work of "the bureaucracy."¹¹ Furthermore, the US government continues to insist on the false assumption that limiting greenhouse gases will have a negative impact on economic activity.

Ironically, the US was once the world leader on the environment. Long ago it created the world's first national park. Beginning in the 1970s, the American government created the Environmental Protection Agency and passed the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act—legislative actions that set precedents for the entire world. In a world facing dire challenges from global pollution, such as global warming and rainforest destruction, America needs to once again rise to the occasion and show historic leadership.

When a powerful country such as the US imposes its will around the world by force, intimidation, or economic coercion, these counterproductive actions serve to highlight all the more the critical need for one world democracy. A change in US foreign policy to one of demilitarization, concern for the environment, and respect for international law is a necessary first step in building a global government.

The fact remains: America and its citizens are a critical link to world peace and planetary health. The US is now the world's sole military superpower. Americans uniquely have the ability to either continue to block progress or to lead by example and help build a world ruled by law, not force.

America's greatest gift to the world is still its ideas. Today the US needs activists, visionaries, and politicians who understand that the concept of a world ruled by law is the great idea of our age.

The US relies very heavily on one card in the international poker game, the military card. We don't like to think of ourselves as a warlike people, but can we expect others to accept us as "peace-loving" when it is really only in arms we trust?

—Immanuel Wallerstein