A Dubious Template for US Foreign Policy

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It is understandable that American decision-makers seized upon the terrorist attacks of 2001 to declare the beginning of a new era. This was a direct, physical attack on the American homeland, the first since 1941. The enemies were specific and tangible, and they acted in the name of an aggressively hostile ideology purporting to represent the goals of the Islamic world. The danger of further attacks was – and remains – apparent, and the presumed threat of a linkage between terror and mass destruction weaponry underscored the need for a new grand strategy.

It was also not surprising that a relatively untested American president and his advisors elected to respond by launching a global campaign against the new enemy. The stakes and the clarity of the issues offered a perfect opportunity to establish leadership credentials and mobilise the nation. These events marked the return of an adversarial world, with detestable bad guys out to kill us, and the first opportunity since the Cold War to restore foreign policy – the preferred terrain of modern presidents – to its erstwhile primacy in American national politics. The eleventh of September 2001 also marked the comeback of foreign policy as a contact sport and the end of a period of seemingly opaque engagements on behalf of abstract values threatened by generic adversaries like warlords and narco-traffickers who did little apparent damage to the US itself.

Three other factors gave the Bush administration a free hand to do more or less what it wished with the opportunity offered by the post-11 September circumstances. Firstly, it is virtually impossible to 'defeat' terrorism – which is, after all, a tactic, not an adversary – especially once US leaders abandoned the initial qualification that the enemy was

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'terrorism of global reach'. Soon American political leaders, echoed by opinion leaders in the media commentariat, began conflating local, regional and genuinely global terror enterprises while also lumping together attacks against civilians with attacks on combatants, as seen in coverage of the war in Iraq. The impossibility of 'defeating terrorism' – especially when defined so indiscriminately – makes it the ideal adversary for decision-makers who describe themselves as wartime leaders. The reality of ever-present terrorist dangers only reinforces this point.

Secondly, the record of the US-led coalition in the battle against terrorists of global reach has apparently been reasonably successful. The US has become a harder target, even while US allies, friends and interests continue to face attacks overseas. The fact that a misconceived elective war in Iraq risked turning into a major strategic failure – recruiting additional enemies faster than coalition forces could kill them – has not detracted from the political reality that the global war on terror may have prevented attacks on US soil by al-Qaeda and its friends for over three years.

Thirdly, the global fight against terror and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have evolved in an implicit symbiosis. Political support has been sustained with the help of a toxic mixture of nationalism and gullibility on the part of an American electorate (to say nothing of the legislative branch and the media) that is ill-prepared to interpret what is going on. The result is that the global war on terror proceeds in tandem with an Iraq venture deeply marred by a chain of misjudgements and strategic errors. The relationship between these campaigns – one a reactive global campaign against terrorism and the al-Qaeda home base in Afghanistan, the other a dare-devil venture in the name of transforming the Middle East – is little understood. The first offers legitimacy to the second while the drama of real-life death and destruction in Iraq ironically obscures perceptions of the other war, reducing the normal level of accountability one might anticipate in a modern democracy.

But there is no hiding the reality that the global war on terror – by itself – is a dubious template for the security challenges of our age. It is faulty because (a) it grossly oversimplifies the challenges we face, creating a severe distortion of focus among policymakers, leading to skewed priorities and a lopsided policy framework; (b) it is based on a false strategic premise, exaggerating both the gravity of the direct threat from terrorists and the effectiveness of using physical force as the primary response; and (c) it denigrates alliance relationships and the non-military dimensions of statecraft that are essential for addressing the dangerous security environments flourishing in much of the globe, stripping away the political and diplomatic legitimacy needed for the

achievement of American purposes. The challenge now is to determine whether a broadened US grand strategy can be developed in concert with European and other allies. This must be a joint rather than a solo enterprise, a less nationalistic and divisive approach, one capable of restoring the sense that the world's leading nations have regained the initiative and know what they are about, rather than lashing out in single-minded and angry reaction to Islamic militants.

Terrorism and WMD: defining the adversary

It has become fashionable to criticise the global war on terror for failing to address the 'underlying causes' of terrorism launched by militant Islamic groups. Those who do so draw upon a wide range of arguments that need not be rehearsed in detail here.[1] Presumed terrorist motivations include disgust at perceived socio-economic injustice and political stagnation in Western-supported autocratic regimes in the Muslim world; anger over US policies in the Israel–Palestine conflict; reaction against Western-influenced cultural globalisation threatening traditional values; and anguish at the humiliation suffered by Muslims at the hands of Western imperialists and colonialists since the imposition of the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres dismembering the Ottoman domains.

Some of these 'ultimate cause' arguments make more sense than others. The most general of these leave policymakers without a cause that can be realistically addressed and without any operational basis to hold accountable the instigators of specific terrorist acts. The most concrete source of terrorist threats can presumably be found in the planning cells of networks that blow people up. What motivates them appears – in the case of al-Qaeda and related groups – to centre on purifying Islam, returning it to its roots, and attacking apostate regimes and their foreign backers. This is a civil war and a war of ideas; Western nations are caught up in both of them. The fact of failed modernisation in numerous Islamic societies is also part of the picture. Beyond these structural causes is the universal factor of human agency: personal ambition and alienation of key individuals, often after traumatic exposure to non-Islamic societies. Today's terrorist threats did not eventuate out of thin air. They are reflections from a specific set of Islamic countries and cultures of a broader phenomenon described by former National Security Council adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski as a 'massive political awakening' in a vast region of political turbulence, conflict and state failure.[2]

This is a civil war and a war of ideas

Despite the best-selling formulations making the rounds in certain parts of the American media, however, the Western nations and their

partners do not face a monolithic, centrally controlled totalitarian adversary – a functional equivalent of the Nazis or the Soviets[3] – but a series of bad conditions and negative security environments that have proven capable of spawning rogue state leaders as well as outlaw non-state actors – for example, terrorist networks and criminal business mafias, some operating with overt or tacit government backing.

Generally speaking, it makes sense to use the military, intelligence, financial and other tools available to expose, rip apart and destroy the global terror networks we can identify. US Centcom Commander and Army General John Abizaid is closer to the mark when he identifies a diffuse Islamist movement of 'Salafist jihadists' and likens their role to that of the pre-revolutionary Bolsheviks. He is quick to recognise that neutralising this vanguard movement cannot be accomplished by direct, physical measures alone.[4] The global war on terror will be a long, dirty war, and we could lose it unless it is accompanied by a sustained campaign to drain the swamp, transforming regions of failed modernisation, endemic conflict and authoritarian politics. It is these bad conditions and poor security environments that deserve the lion's share of our strategic focus. In sum, the challenge before Western policymakers is considerably more complex and long-term than is implied by the catch-phrase 'waging war on terrorism'. A grand strategy for our age cannot rest primarily on the notion that we can somehow 'take out' specific sets of bad guys and thereby make the world safe for democracy, free markets and Western values. Waging physical war against militant jihadis – by itself – will only enhance their recruitment efforts, just as the flawed occupation of Iraq has so far failed to separate insurgents from their surrounding social context.

A parallel set of arguments applies to the question of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation and the risk of these technologies falling into the hands of terrorists. The proximate source of the WMD threat no doubt lies in the ambitions and stratagems of rogue leaders, those in charge of states as well as non-state actors.[5] Here, too, as with terrorism, it makes sense to use all available tools to ward off the threat of further proliferation of such weapons, to forestall their diversion into terrorist hands and pro-actively to prevent their deployment and use when the threats are substantive and imminent. But a grand strategy for our age cannot rest mainly on waging war against the spread of military technology anymore than it can on 'defeating' terrorism.

To build a more secure world order, it will be necessary to target the apparently intractable political tensions and unresolved or frozen geopolitical divisions where the quest for mass destruction weaponry typically arises. It is not an accident that the most worrisome sources of

the threat of WMD proliferation arise in specific kinds of insecure environments: (a) empires or societies undergoing a profound political transformation (for example, South Africa and the four nuclear successors of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s), raising serious doubts about their ability to control or dismantle dangerous technologies; (b) intractable regional conflict patterns (such as the Korean Peninsula and South Asia) rooted in contested sovereignty conflicts or internationalised civil wars; and, (c) unstable regions such as the Middle East featuring unresolved conflicts and powerful states determined to ward off dangers of encirclement, isolation or abandonment. These environments cry out for sophisticated, multi-dimensional and multinational strategies. Each case will be unique. Anti-WMD muscle-flexing has its place. But a far broader diplomatic and foreign-policy context is the essential underpinning for success, as the Anglo-American success in the Libyan case clearly demonstrates. Finally, leading nuclear and non-nuclear powers need to ask themselves, as we come up to the May 2005 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty review conference, what can be done to strengthen the non-proliferation regime so that incentives to seek nuclear arms and nuclear status are reduced.

The divided efforts of the US, the EU and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the case of Iran illustrate graphically the inherent dilemmas we face as well as the policy shortcomings of dealing in a narrow, compartmentalised fashion with this leading nuclear aspirant. There can be little doubt on three points. Firstly, the Iranian regime has unambiguously demonstrated its intent to acquire the full range of nuclear options including weapons. It is difficult to interpret in any other way its manoeuvres and deceptions in the face of widespread and growing international concern. Secondly, the military options for dealing with the Iranian challenge are essentially theoretical; politically, they are non-starters. The Iranians have taken the necessary steps to make such options prohibitively unattractive, while at the same time degrading their likely effectiveness. Thirdly, the conspicuous incoherence among external actors offers a striking contrast to the advantages Tehran enjoys as a unitary and determined actor.

The Iran case provides eloquent testimony of the growing costs of transatlantic division between the US and some of its principal allies who together play a central role in global security and conflict management.[6] Even in a better world, it would be ambitious to devise policies capable of dissuading the Iranians from reaching their goal. But instead of optimising the chances to induce Iranian cooperation, the US and its potential partners have squandered opportunity and handed leverage to the Iranians. Ideally, the US should strive for a truly global consensus

and present it to the Iranians, backed by the threat of sharply increased international isolation and other pressures. But the diplomacy of the global war on terror has mortgaged America's capacity to line up such support. And, the Iraq war handed Teheran fresh influence over American (and, to a degree, European) freedom of action, by giving the Iranians 'Iraqi cards' to play and complicating the already intricate task of setting a coherent agenda of Western priorities for dealing with Iran. The issues on that agenda range from human rights and Iranian behaviour with regard to the Middle East peace process and on support of terrorist movements, to the terms for freezing or terminating the Iranian nuclear programme, Iran's quest for security assurances and an end to its economic isolation, US and UK worries over Iranian meddling in Iraq, and the search for a framework for regional security in the Gulf. Making sense of this inventory of issues, getting the sequence right and establishing the trade-offs is a Herculean task.

The Iraq war handed Tehran fresh influence over American action

But it becomes an impossible puzzle if the major powers are divided. Given the deeply troubled history of US–Iranian relations, the US refusal to engage Iran in direct negotiation over nuclear or other issues is not altogether surprising. But standing back and leaving it to the E-3 troika of Britain, France and Germany to try its hand can only succeed if all the planets are in alignment. Otherwise, the US and – for their own reasons – the Iranians are setting the Europeans up for failure. The British, French and Germans are pursuing a permanent, comprehensive non-proliferation deal through a diplomacy that requires – for its sticks – the support of Russia and China in the Security Council and – for its carrots – the assent of Washington and Iran itself.

This negotiating structure risks becoming a three-ring diplomatic circus (Washington, the IAEA and the E-3), with the Iranians as ring-master. It places no burden on other actors – the Russians, Israelis, Chinese – and gives Iran every incentive to maximise its demands on Washington, thereby shifting the onus for failure in negotiations onto the Western powers. By remaining a bystander to the whole process, Washington advertises its apparent scepticism about European diplomatic efforts while offering no alternative capable of forcing the Iranian authorities to look at hard choices and stop toying with the international community. Perhaps unwittingly, American officials sometimes act as if the primary threat they perceive is the risk of a diplomatic opening with Tehran, not the risk of Iranian weapons acquisition.

More constructive was the joint declaration by Washington and its key European partners at the Sea Island G-8 summit in June 2004 where the US stood together with the Russians and the E-3 in deploring Iran's 'delays, deficiencies in cooperation, and inadequate disclosures' and urging its prompt and full compliance with all of its commitments and IAEA requirements.[7] Despite the firm words, however, the Iranian problem persists. Still missing, apart from voluntary Iranian cooperation, is indispensable US action to place the ball squarely in the Iranian court by means of an explicit commitment to participate in hammering out the pieces of a package deal. At the same time, the US should push the issue with China and Russia so that the E-3 receive the backing they require to be able threaten a move to the Security Council if that proves to be necessary.

Getting serious about global security

It is not too late for American and European policymakers to work toward a more comprehensive grand strategy to serve alongside the global war on terror and such key counter-proliferation initiatives as UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and the Proliferation Security Initiative launched in 2003. Such a broader strategy review could help to restore a healthier political and diplomatic context for grappling with the underlying patterns of tension and the unresolved divisions that fester in turbulent regions, creating opportunities for bad actors to exploit.

First, however, it is important to pinpoint what the transatlantic strategic divisions of the past three years are really all about. To some, the primary source of the split is divergent interests and policies in the Middle East. Differences over the implications of the civil war within Islam, over the Israel–Palestine conflict and, above all, over the Bush administration's war of choice in Iraq are the prime factors straining the alliance. Others find congenial the 'power and weakness' hypothesis put forward by Robert Kagan,[8] arguing that the US elects to confront and eliminate concrete 'threats' because it uniquely has the military power to do so, while Europeans leaders – being far weaker militarily – prefer to address 'challenges' and 'issues' such as ethnic conflict on the basis of such resources as governance and development assistance and diplomatic engagement. Power asymmetry, it is argued, has created a lasting ideological divide over the use of force and the relative weight that should attach to its control by laws, rules and institutions. In an important commentary, Francis Fukuyama noted a deeper issue of principle dividing the liberal democracies when it comes to the use of force: whether democratic legitimacy in taking such decisions comes from internal, constitutional procedures of the nation state or flows externally from the formal, official acts of international institutions.[9]

Yet it is dubious to suggest that Americans would behave like Europeans – and vice versa – if their military power resources were reversed. History counts, and Europe's experience of war in the industrial age differs markedly from the American experience. This may offer some explanation for the European reluctance (Britain, and to a lesser degree France, apart) to participate in American-led ventures to cope militarily with the dangerous anarchy of the non-European security environment, while EU policymakers concentrate on the 'post-historical' agenda of building a zone of peace. It is not only the ghastly history of European warfare, but also the political and military burdens of overseas empire and decolonisation which had a searing impact on post-Second World War European domestic politics. To be sure, Americans experienced the painful stalemate of Korea and the trauma of Vietnam. But these conflicts have not instilled into the national consciousness a comparable reflex to question the utility of using military power as the principal instrument for engaging the turbulent zones of failed states, modernisation struggles, warlordism, terrorism and endemic civil conflict.

In the fullness of time, the experience of trying to manage a global policy on the basis of the war on terror template will likely prove sobering for American policymakers. Much will hinge on how the Bush administration's Iraq project evolves in tandem with the global war on terror. If the early rounds of the post-11 September US strategic debate were won by advocates of hard power-based hegemonic 'primacy', it may emerge that a less unilateral and less militarised strategy (sometimes dubbed 'selective engagement') is more sustainable militarily, as well as politically and economically.[10] Interestingly, the tone of commentary from conservative defence and foreign-policy intellectuals has been far from uniform, and some have made eloquent appeals for a greater reliance on diplomacy, a better grasp of the political arts of running an empire, upgraded civilian capabilities for post-conflict state building, a restoration of legitimacy in the eyes of democratic allies and the need to make international institutions work better.[11]

The pendulum began swinging back from the extremes of dare-devil unilateralism even before the Iraq invasion. But the real debate ought not to be framed in terms of hegemonic unilateralism versus 'selective engagement' multilateralism. Still less should we conceive of the choice as hard power versus 'soft power' strategies. It is useful to note the decline of American soft power resources,[12] but the soft power concept fails to capture the real missing ingredient in post-11 September American strategic thinking: good old-fashioned statecraft. Smart statecraft is what you get when wits, wallets and muscle pull together so that leverage in

all its forms is harnessed to a realistic action plan or political strategy that can be set in motion by agile diplomacy. Smart statecraft does not dispense with hard power; it uses hard power intelligently, recognising the limits as well as the potential of purely military power, and integrating it into an over-arching political strategy.

As professional soldiers are the first to recognise, successful military action can defeat enemy forces, topple regimes, seize and occupy territory, or deter immediate threats; but such action creates only brief moments of opportunity, not lasting political results. To exploit them, you need relationships, allies, expert knowledge of local and regional politics and cultures, security institutions, assistance and training resources, legitimacy and persuasive advocacy.

The United States and its liberal democratic allies still possess massive amounts of such smart power – alliance structures and relationships, many kinds of assistance programmes, civil society linkages, leadership roles in all the major international institutions, outright command of the 'global commons' in military as well as non-military terms, a respectable supply of 'boots-on-the ground' expeditionary forces that can be projected into specific conflict zones, vast educational and cultural resources, and a dominant share of world's diplomatic, communications and intelligence capabilities. Defined in this fashion, the US has a leading – not a hegemonic – share of global power assets, and in certain categories the European contribution is larger than the American. What has been too often absent since 11 September is the conscious harnessing of all this potential leverage in the pursuit of common purposes among the leading powers to tackle the global security agenda. This requires leadership exercised through diplomatic relationships and legitimate, collective fora.

If the American pendulum is, indeed, swinging back, this would open up the possibility of greater inter-allied convergence, if not consensus, on the elements of smarter grand strategy. This would include fighting terrorism and countering proliferation, to be sure, but it must also address broader issues of peace and security in the Middle East, strengthening peacekeeping capacity and state institutions in Africa, sustaining American and allied interests in the evolving but still inchoate security architecture of East Asia, and developing a common language on a wide spectrum of other security-related issues.

There are three patterns of insecurity that warrant sustained attention, using all the statecraft and smart power tools at the disposal of the major powers. Success in dealing with them will serve to 'drain the swamp' that sustains bad actors while also advancing a range of other critical goals and values.

Weak and failed states

A panoply of interests and values of concern to the international community are placed in jeopardy in the 50–60 countries identified in one recent study of weak states.[13] These include security threats, criminal mafias and illegal trafficking, failures of democratisation, wrecked economies and humanitarian crises associated with intractable civil conflicts. It is not difficult to make the case that weak and failed states are a problem. They occupy a vast zone stretching across large parts of developing Asia, the Middle East, Africa and pockets of Latin America.

The strategic issues are how to select among the host of candidates to address and what tools offer the best chances for positive effect. A recent IISS study of counter-terrorism makes the case that weak states may be more attractive hosts to foreign terrorists and dangerous criminals than failed states due to the advantages of having a corruptible buffer of ineffective governance in such porous, easily penetrated places.[14] If so, the list of worrisome candidates is long indeed. The basic criteria for selection must include: (a) states caught up in the intra-Islamic ferment taking place in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Central, South and Southeast Asia; (b) states whose agonies have the greatest likelihood of spreading regionally to bring whole sub-regions into turmoil; and (c) states whose failures have the greatest potential for enabling rogues, tyrants and terrorists to become firmly established.

Letting the fires of state failure burn is not a serious option

There is much debate about state-building, whether one looks at moments of declining state viability outright state collapse, or the aftermath of violent regime change. But there can be little doubt that the core of the problem is to replace the rule of men and guns by the rule of law and institutions. Some view the challenge as essentially one of economic development. In reality, the development gap is political and institutional, as well as economic. A central concern is getting the sequence of modernisation processes right. If the first priority is to strengthen state institutions, this could have profound implications for both democracy promotion and development assistance policies. Similarly, the institution-building approach requires careful examination of what roles outside actors can play that successfully enhance state capacity and fit the local cultural context, while avoiding measures and programmes that ironically undercut local capacity.[15]

It ought to be clear after state failure in Somalia, Afghanistan and Rwanda – and the threat of a similar pattern in Pakistan and Nigeria – that letting the fires of failure burn is not a serious option. Faced with the

reality of widespread governance failures, leading democracies have focused increasing attention on remedies. Some mixture of the following have drawn particular attention: expanded support of capacity building to upgrade local and regional resources for peace operations; enhanced techniques of 'transitional administration' or de facto trusteeship for societies moving from one status or political dispensation to another; greater reliance on de facto measures of 'shared sovereignty' in selected fields of endeavour where 'stateness' is especially undeveloped and the capacity to behave in a sovereign manner is lacking.[16] Such discrete fields as customs and tax collection, oil revenue management and distribution, port and maritime security, air traffic control, central banking, commercial law, police and judiciary reform all lend themselves to focused cooperation between local and external authorities. The tools and techniques of counter-proliferation and counter-terrorism could make significant contributions to broader, concerted state-building initiatives – for example, vulnerable areas such as immigration control, corruption and criminal business activity could be systematically addressed through intelligence sharing, forensic accounting and asset tracing.

There is no shortage of tools and resources for tackling the weak state challenge. A brief visit to recent G-8 summit websites reveals a veritable cornucopia of individual programmes and commitments of engagement between G-8 members and developing areas such as Africa. Eager to impress partners, recipients as well as home audiences, these inventories bear closer resemblance to a laundry list than a strategy. The need is for joint planning that produces decisions on a country or regional focus, sequencing and burden sharing. The most recent G-8 summit declaration on capacity building for peacekeeping – a sterling set of concepts built upon a welter of separate proposals – would be a fine place to start.[17] The year-long African commission spear-headed by British Prime Minister Tony Blair is another example of the kind of focused, sustained leadership needed to create a catalyst for action, albeit on a continent-wide scale.

Regional conflict systems

Many of the toughest security challenges arise within regional or sub-regional conflict systems in which poisoned, distrustful inter-state relationships interact with troubled, often authoritarian-ruled states. Conflicts within one society become the hostage of a neighbouring conflict occasioned by refugee flows, diaspora support, and reciprocal support of rebels or warlords. In regions such as Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa where arms are plentiful and borders are porous, it is almost axiomatic that an internal struggle will spill into neighbouring

lands, as the cases of Afghanistan, Liberia and Rwanda so clearly demonstrate. Often, a regional patchwork of ethnic or communal minorities provides crucial tinder to the mix, as in the Balkans and the south Caucasus.

The point for grand strategy is that these regional patterns are resistant to a one-country approach focused exclusively, for example, on ending a civil war. They also resist a single-track, one-size-fits-all approach focused on fixing the security manifestations of the problem. Counter-proliferation initiatives will not fix them because the underlying pattern of conflict is not addressed. Expensive peace operations run the risk of becoming long-term commitments because the 'solution' they offer is purely external and collapses when foreign forces leave. Anti-terrorism campaigns may roll up one set of bad guys, but also train local rulers and rogues how to work the new international system and define their local adversaries as terrorists to entrench further their hold on power.

One answer lies in developing regional (or sub-regional) security dialogue mechanisms, paralleled by regional partnerships with external states or groups of states. Where such mechanisms already exist, they can be upgraded and deepened through external support. The political will to rise above regional polarisation does not come out of thin air: typically, it is born of war's aftermath, in response to distinctly new circumstances or the challenge of stopping a conflict that has literally spun out of control, threatening the interests of all major regional players. Conflict-torn regions are likely to remain mired in their bad security environments until they find, through one means or another, a means of connectedness to an external source of security support, interest and engagement. This need is the genesis of 'groups of friends', typically donors and historic partners of regional parties that agree to sponsor and support regional initiatives with programmes of security training, demobilisation and reintegration assistance for former combatants, negotiation assistance (such as offering observers or facilitators) and general financial support. This 'adopt-a-region' approach can be useful where local parties have few resources, and where each party or group of parties maintains separate links to diverse external states. 'Friends' offer a representative and balanced set of relationships and influences.

Where a single cleavage is the organising political reality of the zone, such support groups must contain representative sponsors of both sides. This is the pattern with the slowly evolving drive for an international conference mechanism on peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes region of Africa – an initiative originally pushed by a number of individual African and European figures and which held its

first summit event, sponsored by the African Union and the UN, in November 2004 in Tanzania.

Larger in scale are the periodic multi-regional meetings between ASEAN members and their entire universe of external partners in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) or between SADC leaders and their counterparts in the EU. No doubt valuable as a way of highlighting and signalling support for local capacity and responsibility, such activity may help create a context for bilateral and multilateral assistance planning on a scaleable basis, and a channel for the informal flows of ideas and contacts. On the other hand, such large groupings tend to operate at the lowest common denominator of consensus and to gloss over the most truly divisive problems.

Where the challenge is to overcome the lack of basic consensus on building an inclusive regional security architecture, as in East Asia and the Pacific, official proposals by major powers may be stymied. The most creative response may be for them to discretely encourage the active engagement of track two networks with good connections to policy elites and solid expertise in security sector issues. This was the origin of the Council on Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) founded in 1993 among strategic studies centres in ten countries and now including representation from all relevant states; CSCAP has produced an important set of reports and memoranda on topics ranging from maritime security to confidence building measures in Northeast Asia. At their best, such initiatives may help shape the intellectual climate in which regional elites operate within and outside of government agencies.

There is also space for non-official initiative in regions with existing official mechanisms that exclude major regional actors. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), for example, was created (with considerable support from friendly Western partners) in substantial part for self-protection in a dangerous neighbourhood that included powerful, heavily armed neighbours. In today's rapidly changing security climate, there remains no official forum in which the GCC members and Yemen, Iraq and Iran could meet for security dialogue with each other and key outside powers. This was the backdrop against which the IISS recently organised the first of what could become a series of 'Gulf Dialogues' on critical regional security issues. This initiative is itself a form of non-official statesmanship. The decision of senior officials from regional and key non-regional states to participate is also interesting evidence of statesmanship.

The security architecture of some 12 sub-regional conflict zones needs sustained attention and additional linkage building.[18] Some of these zones are of greater interest to certain leading powers than others. A natural

division of effort and sharing of roles (and credit) is not impossible to envisage, especially if all external powers operate on the premise that their goal is to work themselves out of a job by successfully shepherding the emergence of self-dependent and locally legitimised security mechanisms. To be avoided is the sort of narrow compartmentalisation that can occur in a place such as West Africa where UN peace operations are deployed in three places in parallel with the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) forces units, while Britain, the US and France each operate as 'lead nation' in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, respectively. All of this external engagement is impressive and to be welcomed. But given the intricate inter-connections between armed factions, refugee movements, arms supplies, clandestine commodity trading across these borders, the need for integrated operational planning by all external parties is painfully obvious.

Taming intractable conflicts

The third pattern of insecurity deserving focused attention in a smarter grand strategy is the management and settlement – where possible – of seemingly intractable conflicts. Violent disputes that fester into protracted struggles, often over decades, acquire fresh layers of complexity and additional obstacles to settlement. The intractable cases deserve consideration in any grand strategy because they too spawn terrorism and promote a form of 'struggle politics' that justifies the quest for the most destructive weapons. Intractable conflicts breed leaders who depend upon adversaries and wartime conditions to sustain their hold on power. The most salient current cases define our age and shape the battle of ideas and values at stake in a number of regions – the Koreas, Kashmir, Sudan, Colombia, Israel–Palestine, the Balkans, Sri Lanka, Eurasia's unrecognised state conflicts (Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova, the Georgian cases), Cyprus and the Great Lakes of Africa.

A smarter grand strategy would give a central place to the possibilities of diplomacy, negotiation and mediation – backed by all relevant forms of power and influence – deployed in the service of winding down these festering conflicts and thereby helping to drain the global swamps. This is not to say that every intractable case can be successfully mediated. But measures of conflict management and conflict ripening are within reach in most cases, placing the conflict parties under fresh pressures to make tough choices about their conduct and their options.

A clear sense of where intractability comes from is the first step in developing responses.[19] In these cases, the passage of time adds to the sides' sense of grievance, elevating sunk costs and making compromise

less attractive. The calculus facing leaders is perverse: continued conflict hurts them too little for their cost-benefit analysis to shift toward settling; entrenched interests in the war economy grow as time passes, while the cost of settling and thus terminating their relationship with the struggle rises to the point that a substantial percentage of struggle leaders become 'spoilers'. Peace could, in some cases, become a threat to their place in history, to their political careers, their personal wealth and safety. Intractable conflicts feature leaders who are relatively unconstrained by their domestic political base and can command the resources required to keep on fighting. In other cases, one or both sides is too weak or divided to make peace, an inherently divisive process. The sheer passage of time may serve to accumulate experience of failed peace talks and discredited or disavowed solutions, adding another layer of distrust. These cases tend to occur in polities where civilians have little means of controlling armed factions, and in regions with relatively ineffective security mechanisms to offer credible guarantees that the terms of a possible settlement will be monitored and enforced.

This brief portrait illustrates the obstacles to terminating such conflicts, but it also points the way toward methods and circumstances for working toward settlements. At certain points, the so-called intractable cases do, in fact, become amenable to settlement, typically with the assistance of determined and skilful third party efforts. Cyprus recently came close, and will in time no doubt return to the negotiating terms discussed previously. As a result of sustained and purposeful peacemaking efforts led by the US, UK, Kenya and Norway over the past three years, Sudan's north–south conflict is within reach of being resolved as this article is written. The Sudanese case shows an awareness of the link between conflict, peacemaking, failed states and terrorism. Northern Ireland is a case of conflict being resolved in drawn-out stages; the Balkans has also witnessed piecemeal peacemaking. Cambodia, Angola and Mozambique all moved from war to peace. Some breakthroughs occur at times of basic systemic change in the surrounding environment. Others emerge with a change in leadership in one of the parties, a change in the military balance, the introduction of new external relationships or the entry of a powerful or especially persuasive mediator.

Grand strategy cannot wait for the right conditions to emerge

Grand strategy cannot count on – or wait for – such conditions to emerge, and must focus on those things that can be controlled, or at least influenced. These include: reinforcing local military stalemates and blocking the parties' search for unilateral military advantages; helping to

define and legitimise the zone of negotiability in long-festering conflicts so that the parties are gradually sobered into more realistic settlement terms; creating externally coherent negotiating mechanisms so that parties are effectively encircled by a unified game-plan for settlement talks and not able to go 'forum shopping'; cultivating the emergence of more imaginative leaders and constraining or threatening the more recalcitrant ones. A smarter strategy for the leading democracies would recognise that every intractable conflict is in one sense unique, and that formal mediation may never be appropriate in certain instances where pride is too great or power asymmetry too large to make it acceptable. But it would give conflict management a central place at the top table where statecraft is developed and strategies for shaping events are defined.

Pulling together a strategy

There may be an opportunity during the first year of President George Bush's second term for the leading democracies to review current strategies and devise a broader and smarter approach for coping with the security challenges of the time. The resources of all these powers are finite, and the need for sharing of burdens is increasingly evident. So, too, are the unacceptably high costs of the current approach.

In addition, there are precedents of effective joint action on which to build. In Central Asia, the Western nations eventually found a basis for limited military cooperation and burden-sharing under a NATO aegis in Afghanistan, even if the scale of alliance military and state-building efforts continues to fall short. On the sub-continent, India and Pakistan pulled back from the abyss of confrontation in part due to low-key western diplomatic initiatives. In the Libyan case, the US and UK used a full panoply of policy levers available to shift Gaddafi's behaviour, and then decided to take 'yes' for an answer rather than continually moving the goalposts. Having shown that there is more than one way to 'change' regimes, the American administration has given itself some manoeuvring room for managing and engaging other rogues. With the conclusion of the north–south peace accords in Sudan in January 2005, a coalition of African and Western governments has constructively shaped history, in hope of blocking a state failure scenario and ending an intractable conflict. In the war on terrorism itself, despite severe alliance strains, France and Germany have worked closely and constructively with the US and others on the financial and intelligence fronts. The Proliferation Security Initiative is another good precedent.

These precedents confirm that the ideas and instruments exist not only for prosecuting the campaign against terror and proliferation but for

broadening and strengthening a grand strategy capable of building stronger states, more stable regions and more peaceful societies even in the hardest and most intractable cases. In the end, however, the prospects for turning things around will depend upon the US – in league with its closest European and Asian partners – being able to provide smart and sustained leadership beyond Iraq, Afghanistan and the war on terrorism. That means, among other things, grasping the Korean nettle and finding a basis for re-engaging the Iranians: failure on these fronts is not acceptable even under the narrowest definition of American national interests and strategic goals.

But the greater challenge is to recognise exactly how narrow that definition has been. To be sure, as American historian John Lewis Gaddis argues, part of the problem has been a failure of Washington to make a persuasive case – a problem of bad manners, wrong language and a poorly articulated vision – for multilateral support of its pre-emptive use of military power 'in a suddenly more dangerous world'.[20] But the American response to the terrorist attacks of 2001 has diverted attention away from longer term and more fundamental questions for Western statecraft. Rather than creating new institutions or laying in place the building blocks for a new international system, the US has shaken up and weakened the old one, leaving almost everyone wondering who will lead, with which instruments, using what institutions (if any), and relying on which source of legitimacy. Those questions need answers. No single power can address the range and depth of challenges that lie ahead.

Notes

[1] Among the most useful discussions of the sources of terrorism are by Audrey Kurth Cronin, David C. Rapoport, and Martha Crenshaw in Cronin and James M. Ludes (eds.) *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004); see also the Foreword by Dennis Ross in Jonathan Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups and The Next Generation of Terror* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004) for his discussion of the roots of hostility toward America that terrorists exploit.

[2] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership*, (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

[3] See Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 2003) who likens Islamism to its Nazi and Communist precursors as irrational death cults.

[4] See interview with Abizaid in David Ignatius, 'Achieving real victory could take decades', *Washington Post*, 26 December 2004.

[5] For a chilling profile of a key ringleader, see William J. Broad and David E. Sanger, 'As Nuclear Secrets Emerge in Khan Inquiry, More are Suspected', *New York Times*, 26 December 2004.

[6] Geoffrey Kemp, *US and Iran: The Nuclear Dilemma: Next Steps* (Washington DC: The Nixon Center, 2004).

[7] See the G-8 Action Plan on Non-Proliferation, summit documents, at www.g8usa.gov/d_060904d.htm; the author thanks Patrick W. Clawson for drawing his attention to this declaration.

[8] Robert Kagan, 'Power and Weakness', *Policy Review*, June 2002.

[9] Francis Fukuyama, 'Has History Restarted Since 11 September?', John Bonython Lecture, Melbourne, Australia, 8 August 2002 at http://www.cis.org.au/Events/JBL/JBL02.htm

[10] Barry R. Posen 'Command of the Commons: The Military Foundations of US Hegemony', *International Security*, vol. 28, no. 1, summer 2003.

[11] An important early dissent on Iraq came from John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M.Walt, 'An Unnecessary War', *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2003. A book-length conservative critique is by Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). An intriguing intra-neo-con debate is between Francis Fukuyama, 'The Neoconservative Moment', *The National Interest*, summer 2004, and Charles Krauthammer, 'In Defense of Democratic Realism', *The National Interest*, fall 2004. Robert Kagan reminds conservatives and everyone else that legitimacy really matters in 'America's Crisis of Legitimacy', *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2004. A thoughtful appeal for more competent imperialism is by Eliot A. Cohen, 'History and Hyperpower', *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2004.

[12] Joseph S. Nye, Jr., 'The Decline of America's Soft Power', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2004.

[13] *On the Brink: Weak States and US National Security, a report of the Commission on Weak States and US National Security,* (Washington DC: Center for Global Development, 2004); see also Chester A. Crocker, 'Engaging Failed States', *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, 2003 and Robert I. Rotberg, (ed.) *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[14] Jonathan Stevenson, *Counter-terrorism: Containment and Beyond*, Adelphi Paper 367 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the IISS, 2004).

[15] Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century,* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[16] An especially trenchant analysis is in Stephen D. Krasner, 'Sharing Sovereignty: New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States', *International Security,* fall 2004; see also, James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, 'Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States', *International Security*, spring 2004.

[17] 'G-8 Action Plan: Expanding Global Capability for Peace Support Operations' at www.g8usa.gov/d_061004c.htm

[18] The 12 include the Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Strait, Tajikistan and its neighbours, India and Pakistan, the south Caucasus, the Gulf, the Israel–Arab complex, the Andean states, Zimbabwe and its neighbours, the African Great Lakes, the Horn, and the West African conflict zone of Sierra Leone-Liberia-Guinea-Cote d'Ivoire. Others could be added.

[19] This discussion is drawn from Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall, *Taming Intractable Conflicts: Mediation in the Hardest Cases*, (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 2004). A number of the cases mentioned are discussed in detail in their edited companion volume, *Grasping The Nettle: Analyzing Cases of Intractable Conflict*, (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 2005).

[20] John Lewis Gaddis, 'Grand Strategy in the Second Term', *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2005.