

Toward a Liberal Realist Foreign Policy

A memo for the next president

by JOSEPH S. NYE JR.

ON JANUARY 20, you will inherit a legacy of trouble: Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Palestine, North Korea for starters. Failure to manage any one of them could mire your presidency and sap your political support—and threaten the country's future. At the same time, you must not let these inherited problems define your foreign policy. You need to put them in a larger context and create your own vision of how Americans should deal with the world.

Some pundits believe that no matter who wins the 2008 election, he or she will be bound to follow the broad lines of President Bush's strategy. Vice President Cheney has argued, "When we get all through 10 years from now, we'll look back on this period of time and see that liberating 50 million people in Afghanistan and Iraq really did represent a major, fundamental shift, obviously, in U.S. policy in terms of how we dealt with the emerging terrorist threat—and that we'll have fundamentally changed circumstances in that part of the world." President Bush himself has pointed out that Harry Truman suffered low ratings in the last year of his presidency because of the Korean War, but today is generally held in high regard, while South Korea is a democracy protected by American troops. Do not accept this over-simplification of history. By this stage of his presidency, Truman had built major cooperative institutions such as the Marshall Plan and NATO. In contrast, the unbridled unilateral style of the neoconservatives and assertive nationalists in the Bush administration produced a foreign policy that was like a car with a hair-trigger accelerator but no brakes. It was bound to go off the road.

The crisis of September 11, 2001, created an opportunity for George W. Bush to express a bold vision. But one should judge a vision by whether it balances ideals with capabilities: anyone can produce a wish list, but *effective* visions combine feasibility with the inspiration. Among past presidents, Franklin Roosevelt was good at this, but Woodrow Wilson was not. David Gergen, director of the Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership, has described the difference between the boldness of FDR and that of the current president: "FDR was also much more of a public educator than Bush, talking people carefully through the challenges

and choices the nation faced, cultivating public opinion, building up a sturdy foundation of support before he acted. As he showed during the lead-up to World War II, he would never charge as far in front of his followers as Bush." Bush's temperament is less patient. As one journalist put it, "He likes to shake things up. That was the key to going into Iraq."

The Context of Foreign Policy

A KEY SKILL you will need is "contextual intelligence." Chapman professor of business administration Nitin Nohria and lecturer of business administration Anthony Mayo have defined contextual intelligence as the ability to understand an evolving environment and to capitalize on trends in changing markets. In foreign policy, contextual intelligence is the intu-

itive diagnostic skill that helps you align tactics with objectives to create smart strategies in varying situations. Of recent presidents, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush had impressive contextual intelligence, which starts with a good understanding of the current context of American foreign policy, both at home and abroad.

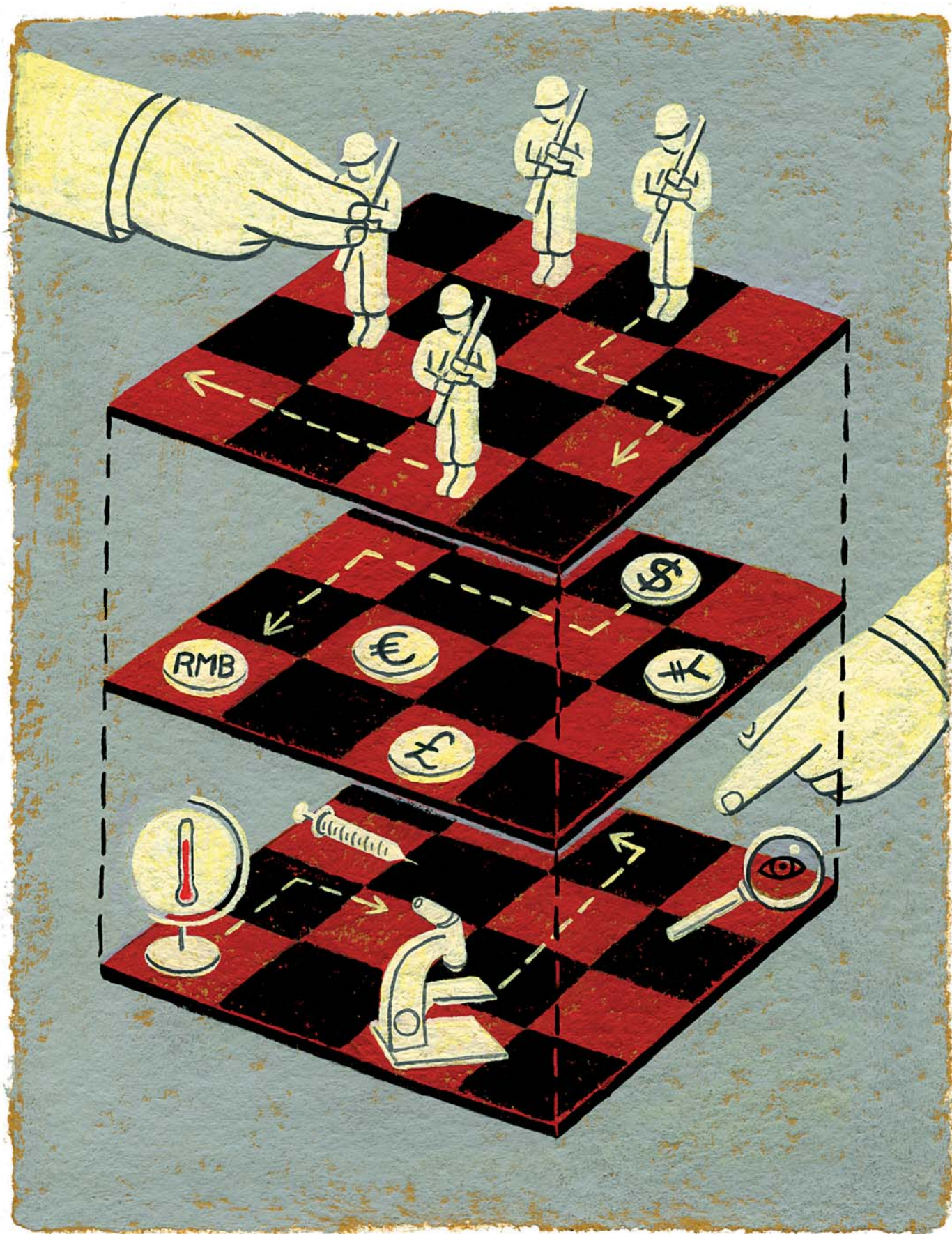
Unfortunately, many academics, pundits, and advisers have often been mistaken about America's position in the world. Two decades ago, for example, the conventional wisdom was that the United States was in decline, suffering from "imperial overstretch." A decade later, with the end of the Cold War, the new conventional wisdom was that the world was a unipolar American hegemony. Some neoconservatives drew the conclusion that the United States could decide what it thought was right, and others would have no choice but to follow. Charles Krauthammer celebrated this view as "the new unilateralism," and it heavily influenced the Bush administration even before the shock of the September 11 attacks produced a new "Bush Doctrine" of preventive war and coercive democratization.

This new U.S. unilateralism of the early twenty-first century was based on a profound misunderstanding of the nature of power in world politics. Power is the ability to get the outcomes one wants. Whether the resources one possesses will produce such outcomes depends upon the context. In the past, it was assumed that military power dominated most issues, but in today's world, the contexts of power differ greatly for military, economic, and transnational issues.

A Liberal Realist Vision

THE OLD DISTINCTION between realists and liberals needs to give way to a new synthesis that you might choose to call "liberal realism." What should a liberal realist foreign policy comprise?

First, it would start with an understanding of the strength and limits of American power. We are the only superpower, but preponderance is *not* empire or hegemony. We can influence, but not control, other parts of the world. The context of world politics today is like a three-dimensional chess game. The top board of military power is unipolar; but on the middle board of eco-



conomic relations, the world is multipolar. On the bottom board of transnational relations (such as climate change, illegal drugs, pandemics, and terrorism) power is chaotically distributed. Military power is only a small part of the solution in responding to these new threats. They require cooperation among governments

and international institutions. Even on the top board (where the United States represents nearly half of world defense expenditures), our military is supreme in the global commons of air, sea, and space, but much more limited in its ability to control nationalistic populations in occupied areas.

Second, a liberal realist policy would stress the importance of developing an integrated grand strategy that combines hard military power with soft “attractive power” to create smart power of the sort that won the Cold War. In a war on terrorism, we need to use hard power against the hard-core terrorists, but we cannot hope to win unless we gain the hearts and minds of the moderates. If the misuse of hard power creates more new terrorists than we can kill or deter, we will lose. Right now, we have no integrated strategy for combining hard and soft power. Many official instruments of soft power—public diplomacy, broadcasting, exchange programs, development assistance, disaster relief, even military-to-military contacts—are scattered throughout the government, with no overarching strategy or budget that even tries to integrate them with military power into a unified national-security strategy. We spend about 500 times more on the military than we do on broadcasting and exchanges. Is this the right proportion? How would we know? How would we make trade-offs? And how should the government relate to the nonofficial generators of soft power—everything from Hollywood to Harvard to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—that emanate from our civil society?

Third, the objective of a liberal realist policy should be to advance the principle of “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness” that has long constituted American political culture. Such a grand strategy would have four key pillars:

- providing security for the United States and its allies;
- maintaining a strong domestic and international economy;
- avoiding environmental disasters (such as pandemics and negative climate change); and
- encouraging liberal democracy and human rights at home and abroad where feasible at reasonable levels of cost.

This does *not* mean imposing American values by force. Democracy is better fostered by attraction than by coercion—and it takes time and patience. Here we should lead by example, heed Ronald Reagan’s adaptation of John Winthrop, and act like a “shining city on a hill.” Overseas, the United States should try to encourage the gradual evolution of democracy where possible, but in a manner that accepts the reality of diversity. Right now, our calls for democracy are heard as an imperial imposition of American institutions. We need fewer Wilsonian calls to make the world safe for democracy, unless

combined with John F. Kennedy’s rhetoric of “making the world safe for diversity.”

Five Major Challenges

AMONG ALL the possible challenges in engaging the world—from a resurgent Russia to our interests in Latin America and Africa—such a liberal realist strategy for your administration should place priority on five major challenges.

Probably the greatest danger to the American way of life would be the intersection of terrorism with nuclear materials. Preventing this requires policies for counterterrorism, nonproliferation, better protection of foreign nuclear materials, stability in the Middle East, and attention to failed states.

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Political Islam and how it develops is the second priority. The current struggle against extreme Islamist terrorism is sometimes characterized as a “clash of civilizations.” More accurately, it is a civil war within Islamic civilization—between a radical minority, which uses violence to enforce a simplified and ideological version of their religion, and a mainstream that has more tolerant views. Although the largest number of Muslims live in Asia, they are influenced by how the heart of this struggle is playing out in the Middle East, an area that has lagged behind the rest of the world in globalization, openness, transparent institutions, and democratization. More open trade, economic growth, better education, development of civil institutions, and gradual increases in political participation may help strengthen the mainstream over time, but so also will the way Muslims are treated in Europe and the United States. Equally important will be whether Western policies toward the Middle East attract or repel mainstream Muslims.

The third major challenge would be the rise of a hostile hegemon as Asia gradually regains the three-fifths share of the world economy that corresponds to its three-fifths of the world population. Forestalling this outcome requires a policy that embraces China as a responsible stakeholder, but hedges against possible hostility by maintaining close relations with Japan, India, and other countries in the region.

The fourth major threat would be an economic depression that could be triggered by financial mismanagement or a crisis that disrupts global access to the Persian Gulf (where two-thirds of world oil reserves are located). Meeting this challenge will require policies that gradually reduce dependence on oil while realizing that we will not be able to isolate the American economy from global energy markets and must not succumb to costly and counterproductive protectionism.

The fifth major threat to our way of life may be termed ecological breakdowns such as pandemics or climate change. Again, part of the solution requires prudent energy policies, combined with leadership on climate change and greater cooperation through international institutions such as the World Health Organization.

Finally, atop these five major threats, a liberal realist policy should look to the long-term evolution of world order, realizing the responsibility of the largest coun-

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LETTERS

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mouth, and Swarthmore for nearly 25 years, I've had the opportunity to read many student essays about college life. I consider "Applying Yourself" to be one of the most insightful statements yet about the personal academic journey at such highly selective schools. I believe that Goodwin's essay should be circulated to high-school and college-age students across the country, and I plan to do my part by sharing the essay (with her gracious permission) with students here at Swarthmore.

JIM LARIMORE
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RACE AND GENETICS

YOUR STORY ON "Lucky Jim" Watson ("Chairman of the Bored," a book review, January-February, page 24) could at best be considered ill-timed. Apparently Watson admires the University of Chicago as a place that produced graduates "capable of critical thought and morally compelled to use those critical capacities—damn the consequences," and where he "learned the

need to be forthright and call crap crap." Well, speaking of crap, what about Watson's views on race and genetics? Shouldn't you have been forthright about that?

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Editor's note: Steven Shapin's review was written before James D. Watson's widely publicized, and criticized, comments on race, made during his book tour. Shapin and the magazine's staff discussed making note of the controversy, but decided that his original text was sufficient as a critical review of the memoir—and of its author.

CARBONIFEROUS INSECTS

IN HIS FASCINATING article on Robert Wood's robotic fly ("Tinker, Tailor, Robot, Fly," January-February, page 8), Dan Morrell asks, "Why did all the four-winged arthropod flyers of the Late Carboniferous Period evolve to have two wings?" Well, they didn't. Four-winged insects, descendants of Late Carboniferous ancestors, still dominate the insect world; think of beetles and butterflies. Only a single major order of

insects, the flies Wood's robots emulate, have reduced their wings to two. Flies appear many millions of years after the Late Carboniferous; there is not a single Carboniferous or Permian flying-insect fossil with only two wings.

I suspect Morrell is confused about wing numbers and the numbers of wing pairs. So really Morrell's question should be: "Why did all the six-winged arthropod fliers of the Late Carboniferous Period evolve to have two pairs of wings?" And just as interestingly, why did one large group later evolve to have a single pair?

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TISSUE AT ISSUE?

YOU QUOTE Dean Harry R. Lewis as saying the Harvard College Toilet Paper Commission of 1998 "met weekly all fall to consider this important issue" (Yesterday's News, January-February, page 58). I suspect what he really said was, "met...to consider this important tissue."

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TOWARD A LIBERAL REALIST FOREIGN POLICY

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try in the international system to produce global public or common goods. In the nineteenth century, Britain defined its national interest broadly to include promoting freedom of the seas, an open international economy, and a stable European balance of power. Such common goods helped Britain, but benefited other countries as well. They also contributed to Britain's legitimacy and soft power. In the early twenty-first century, the United States should similarly promote an open global economy and commons (seas, space, Internet), mediate international disputes before they escalate, and develop international rules and institutions. Because globalization will spread technical capabilities, and information technology will allow broader participation in global communications, American economic and cultural preponderance will become less dominant than at the start of this century. That is all the more reason to build institutions that make the world safe for diversity.

Your Vision and Smart Power

THE UNITED STATES needs to rediscover how to be a "smart power." That was the conclusion of a bipartisan commission that I recently co-chaired with Richard Armitage, the former deputy secretary of state in the Bush administration. A group of Republican and Democratic members of Congress, former ambassadors, retired military officers, and heads of nonprofit organizations was convened by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. We concluded that the effects of the Septem-

ber 11 terrorist attacks have thrown America off course.

Since the shock of 9/11, the United States has been exporting fear and anger, rather than our more traditional values of hope and optimism. Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo have become more powerful global icons of America than the Statue of Liberty. Terrorism is a real threat and likely to be with us for decades, but over-responding to the provocations of extremists does us more damage than the terrorists ever could. Success in the struggle against terrorism means finding a new central premise for American foreign policy to replace the current theme of a "war on terror." A commitment to providing for the global good can provide that premise.

The United States can become a smart power by once again investing in global public goods—providing services and policies that people and governments in all quarters of the world want but cannot attain in the absence of leadership by the largest country. That means support for international institutions, aligning our country with international development, promoting public health, increasing interactions of our civil society with others, maintaining an open international economy, and dealing seriously with climate change. By complementing American military and economic might with greater investments in soft power and a broader vision, you can rebuild the framework that we will need to tackle the tough problems ahead. ▢

Joseph S. Nye Jr. is former dean of the Kennedy School of Government and currently University Distinguished Service Professor and Sultan of Oman professor of international relations. His latest book is *The Powers to Lead*, just published by Oxford University Press.