Imperialism of Neighbors

A new paradigm for the use of American power.

By Michael Hirsh

In the months leading up to the invasion of Iraq, critics of the Bush administration's policy fell into two basic camps. One group opposed war outright; the other supported confronting Saddam but disputed the administration's manner and timing. Both sides, however, agreed on one point: that it was vital to secure international backing for U.S. policy. The war itself wouldn't necessarily require lots of allied military help; most critics understood that American forces alone could probably crush the military of a country like Iraq, whose annual gross domestic product is eight times smaller than the yearly U.S. defense budget. International support was crucial not to winning the war, they argued, but to securing the peace.

On this point, the critics have been proven right. More than a month after the fall of Baghdad, Iraq remains chaotic and lawless, its citizens subject to daily criminal violence and afraid to leave their homes. This suffering could have been greatly alleviated had there been more allied troops on the ground. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld proved that he could beat Iraq's army with far fewer troops than many military experts, including some in the Pentagon, believed was necessary. But the post-war anarchy in Iraq has also proven that you can't keep the peace that way. (See "Faux Pax Americana" by Phillip Carter, on page 11.)

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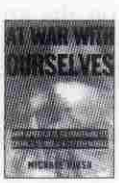

The roughly 90,000 U.S. and British ground troops deployed at the height of the Iraq war were not enough to simultaneously press toward Baghdad, keep the Kurds and Turks from each other's throats, and secure the rear—let alone police Iraq's nuclear sites, ministries, hospitals, and museums. More troops have been pouring in since the fall of Baghdad, but evidently not enough to keep the peace. The consequences of Iraq's anarchy are likely to be profound, and not just because the few weapons of mass destruction that might have been there could now be spreading. A country where the state fails to keep order, allowing robbery and rape to flourish, is, after all, the dystopian version of American society that Middle Eastern dictators sell to their own people. Our failure to maintain basic law and order in Iraq has only validated one of Islamism's basic critiques of America and the societal values we want to export.

The failure to garner international support—both for the invasion and for the post-war occupation—has itself stoked resentment toward the United States among Iraqis. The administration had presumed that average Iraqis would cheer U.S. troops as liberators. But while some did, many others expressed a deep suspicion of our motives and a clear desire that we leave quickly. Though any invading force might have provoked such feelings to some extent, the Iraqis' reaction is likely harsher because U.S. troops entered without U.N. authorization and for weeks tried to keep the peace without U.N. involvement, or making use of U.N. agencies' considerable resources. The Iraqi people's reaction is natural and predictable: Having troops under cover of the international community on one's

soil is understandably less galling and humiliating than being occupied by another country. The average Iraqi may suspect that George W. Bush wants to steal his country's oil, but would be less likely to harbor the same suspicion of Kofi Annan.

This heightening resentment could gravely endanger American policy in Iraq. After floating a number of rationales—from suspected al Qaeda links to weapons of mass destruction—the Bush administration finally settled, in the weeks prior to the invasion, on the idea that our prime war objective was to create a stable, democratic Iraq in order to set off a virtuous chain reaction in the Middle East. To those who questioned our competence in this, administration hawks pointed to postwar Japan and Germany. But those successes required massive, multi-year military occupations. To achieve something similar in Iraq would almost certainly call for a similarly lengthy engagement—and maybe even a longer one, considering the country's ethnic divisions and its lack of democratic institutions and traditions.

We are kidding ourselves if we think the United States can handle this on its own—or even that we would want to. The Bush administration must be given credit for its aggressive reassertion of American power since 9/11. But that tragedy should have also changed forever our notions of peacekeeping, nation-building, and humanitarian intervention. The 21st century is likely to present us with any number of failed states where terrorists lurk, or with tyrants who garner power by exploiting ethnic division, creating destabilizing refugee flows and genocides we cannot ignore. Either America will choose to act, or be dragged into action.

What's needed is a new paradigm for how America should use its unprecedented power—one which recognizes that, while we may be able to fight wars on our own, we can't build a stable peace on our own; and one which takes advantage both of our overwhelming military strength *and* of the legitimizing force that comes with working with allies and through the United Nations. In fact, such a paradigm already exists. It's been brewing for decades. And it's one that both the Republican and Democratic parties may be more in agreement on than you might think.

United Naysayers

A staggering amount of misinformation about the United Nations has been disseminated in recent months, starting with the notion—chiefly promoted by conservatives—that the organization is now almost as useless as the League of Nations once was. Consider the organization's role in Afghanistan. Since the war there ended in December 2001, Rumsfeld has extolled the virtues of "self-reliance" for Kabul, and how quickly Afghanistan was recovering under America's "modest footprint." Yet Afghanistan's self-reliance is largely a myth. Even as U.S. and Allied forces have failed to impose basic order in the country (thanks largely to a paucity of troops), the United Nations has been quietly keeping the country alive. During the winter of 2001-2002, it was the U.N. World Food Programme that moved food aid—much of it supplied by the United States—to hard-to-reach areas as war was still raging. To little notice or acclaim, the WFP averted a famine. It was Lakhdar Brahimi, Kofi Annan's representative for Afghanistan, who conceived and organized the December 2001 Bonn conference establishing an interim Afghan government. The United Nations provided the database for the Tokyo conference of donors to Afghanistan, held in late 2001; coordinated the return of Afghan exiles, many of them educated elites critical to the country's future; and laid the groundwork for postwar politics in Afghanistan. "What we did on the loya jirga you'll never hear about," said Julia Taft, a former State Department official—and a Republican—who now works at the U.N. Development Programme. "We designed all the requirements: getting the tent, getting the food, the food tasters, the security arrangements. How we got people to Kabul is in my mind absolutely miraculous: 1,500 people were moved in two days from all over Afghanistan, by helicopter and fixed-wing planes in our airlift. We got them there all safely and, more importantly, got them home safely. It was the biggest airlift in U.N. history. And every time we kept saying, this is really great, we really pulled this thing off, we were told, well, give the credit to the loya jirga commission, to boost their standing."

Of course, in many ways the United Nations is a mess. The grim lesson of the 1990s—of the disastrous peacekeeping missions from Somalia to Bosnia to Rwanda to Sierra Leone—is that the United Nations will never by itself have sufficient muscle for effective or aggressive peacekeeping or nation-building. But institutions like the United Nations are still invaluable—not for collective security, which they've failed at miserably—but for humanitarian aid and support, as well as infrastructure building, involving schools, hospitals, and clinics, which they're generally good at (as the Bush administration seems, partially and belatedly, to have conceded). More importantly, the U.N. Security Council can confer the kind of legitimacy on war-fighting and nation-building tasks

that unilateralist declarations from Washington clearly cannot.

So it's time to resurrect and take seriously, at long last, one of Bush administration's own ideas: a division of labor in the world. It is an idea that the White House seems to have forgotten as it set about alienating many of America's traditional allies during its two and a half years in office, but one that deserves more currency. America must be the uberpower, overseeing global stability from the commanding heights of air and space, while others must contribute stabilizing troops, like the proposed European rapid-reaction force, in their own backyards. But to bring this harmonious order about we must rethink an even older idea, one that's almost been deemed dead in George W. Bush's Washington: multilateralism. A workable multilateralism.

Call it cooperative regional policing: a hybrid system, dependent on U.S. leadership, regional muscle and, when possible, U.N. legitimation. To work, the new system needs regional powers and organizations like NATO to do the grunt work of peacekeeping and peacemaking that the United Nations has failed at. At the same time, however, such regional forces need to be trained and pressured to act in accordance with universal or U.N. norms, and to go in, when possible, under the auspices of Security Council resolutions.

The peacekeeping and nation-building model for the future will not be collective security using U.N. forces but more often "collective approval" from New York, and with regional powers—often trained, advised, and supplied by the United States—doing the dirty work. In cases where regional powers are not available or trustworthy, U.S. civilian/military peacekeepers can step in. U.N. "blue helmets"—that is, troops under U.N. command—or even observer missions may *still* suffice in some cases. But in general the United Nations needs to become an outsourced organization, much like the modern corporation.

The "CNN Effect"

Regional policing was used to brilliant effect during the 1999 crisis in East Timor, which I regard as a model for how, in the future, American leaders, inevitably drawn into what we once considered other people's problems, can often negotiate a sensible outcome by using the institutions we built, like the United Nations. There, in that tiny, distant province of the Indonesian archipelago—about as far as you can get, literally and figuratively, from what are typically considered America's national interests—East Timorese separatists were being hacked to death with machetes by Jakarta-backed militias. People were dying by the thousands, in the full glare of the international media.

Bill Clinton, who was president at the time, wanted no part of this crisis. After six years in office, his administration was long in the tooth, tired of its crisis-a-minute pace—and not especially eager to sponsor new independence movements. Asked about the crisis at a news conference that week at the White House, the president's national security adviser, Samuel R. Berger, flippantly told reporters that he didn't "intervene" every time his daughter messed up her room at college. Berger, an avuncular, good-natured man, apologized the next day, calling his remark "an awkward way of saying we can't obviously go everywhere, do everything." But he didn't take back the point. While, behind the scenes, U.N. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke did make some efforts to resolve the conflict, Clinton and Berger were publicly avowing the kind of hard-fibered realism that would have done George W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, and their ilk proud.

Then a strange thing happened. Clinton found that, no matter how hard he tried, he could not get away from East Timor. No matter which way he turned, it kept popping up in front of him, like some maddening ghost image, on TV and newspaper front pages, in reporters' persistent questions, and at the top of his discussions with other heads of state at an annual summit of Pacific Rim nations. By coincidence, just as East Timor was exploding in controversy, the president was heading to nearby Auckland, New Zealand, where he would be the leading presence at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, a relatively new forum launched by George H.W. Bush to guarantee America's role as the region's leading economic and military power. Meanwhile, on the ground in East Timor, the United Nations was in jeopardy of losing its credibility altogether after its previous peacekeeping debacles in the 1990s. Anti-separatist militias had the U.N. compound there, established to monitor a referendum on independence, under siege. The secretary general ordered an evacuation.

Like Afghanistan, Indonesia was one of those places that had fallen into Washington's lap without anyone really noticing. This exotic archipelago nation, which straddled many important shipping lanes in Asia, was near collapse thanks to the East Asian financial crisis (precipitated, at least in part, by a rapid market-opening promulgated by the free-market fervor that America had impressed on everyone after the Cold War). The Americans were still sending large-

scale financial aid to Jakarta as a result. Perhaps worst of all for Clinton, the horrors in East Timor were getting blared all over cable and satellite worldwide, 24 hours a day, and eventually dominated the discussions at APEC (where Indonesia, of course, was present). This 24-hour TV culture—the so-called "CNN effect"—had come to be an essential element of the international community, shaping consensus and common opinions among very different countries. Jose Ramos Horta, an East Timorese underground activist, recalled for me how different this was from his early years. During the Cold War, Ramos Horta, who still sports what looks like a permanent three-day stubble, was an obscure, ragged presence who would paste bumper stickers on bathroom stalls at conferences to call attention to his people's plight. But suddenly, he recalls, it all came together for him under the glare of international media, and "the Indonesians were caught off guard." By 1999 Ramos Horta had won a Nobel Peace Prize and world recognition, and Clinton was on the spot. As Berger himself noted glumly at an Auckland press conference, a week after his clumsy remark about intervention, East Timor had "riveted the region's and the world's attention." Clinton was faced with a stark choice: to take the lead against the slaughter, or to jeopardize the credibility of the United Nations, APEC, and America's global leadership role.

So the president, at long last, acted. During a refueling stop in Hawaii en route to Auckland, Clinton announced a suspension of military assistance and sales to Indonesia. Quietly, he also pressured the IMF to withhold money. This was given the heft of international law a few days later, on Sept. 14, when he directed Holbrooke to push through U.N. Security Council Resolution 1264, which authorized a peacekeeping force, at a special late-night session of the Security Council. (China, never eager to approve violations of national sovereignty, interestingly enough approved the intervention, after getting assurances that it would happen only if the Indonesians themselves wanted it.) The Australians, meanwhile, fearing an onslaught of boat people across the Timor Sea—and perhaps coveting an inside track on the rich oil and gas deposits that East Timor would gain—volunteered a peacekeeping force. In the face of all this opprobrium marshaled by the lone superpower, Jakarta finally yielded to an Australian-led troop landing. U.S. forces were involved only at the margins, in a support role, but the mission was a notable success after years of peacekeeping failures. East Timor's transition to democracy and stability since then has been troubled; Rumsfeld, for example, has scoffed that prices are inflated in restaurants and stores in Dili because of the continued U.N. presence. But East Timor, like Bosnia, has at least stabilized and is off our radar screen for the time being.

Holiday in Cambodia

Regionalizing conflicts will always be a messy solution. Australia was a rare First World country situated next door to a Third World hotspot. Other regional powers may not be as trustworthy as Canberra. And there are plenty of places where U.N.-approved regional solutions would prove impossible, or problematic at best. In some parts of the world, like East Africa and Central and South Asia, no regional actor is strong or trusted enough to do the task. This means that in select spots, Washington must pitch in. And in some places, it already has: In Afghanistan, the simmering near-state of war between India and Pakistan, and the deep mistrust of neighboring powers like Iran and Russia, cried out for a U.S.-led or U.N.-led peacekeeping effort, but none was forthcoming; fortunately, NATO decided to go out of area. In central Africa, by contrast, the regional powers are still doing battle—with each other—in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The war on terror could easily become a strategic monstrosity if we don't develop a better strategy, and fast.

But there are potential paths out of many of these nettles, and Washington must clear them. Whereas in the past many regional players reveled in geopolitical schadenfreude over their neighbors' misfortunes—and often exploited them—today, with their national economies increasingly regionalized and globalized, few governments want to risk the economic dislocation and refugee flows that result from nearby conflict. Then, too, the sight of U.N. blue-helmets peacekeeping in their own backyards spurred many regional organizations to take more action themselves. Hence the growing strength of regional organizations across the globe, from the new African Union to the once-toothless Organization of American States, which in recent years has to preempt a war between Ecuador and Peru and helped to restore Venezuelan President

Hugo Chavez to office after a coup.

Few of these organizations are "security" or hard-power oriented, but here the United States can help in beefing them up. America already has a military structure in place to bolster regionalization and to ensure that it works for U.S. national interests: the U.S. military's four major regional commands in East Asia, Central Asia (which includes the Mideast), Europe, and Latin America. The American brass who run these headquarters already act as virtual "proconsuls" around the world, as *The Washington Post*'s Dana Priest has noted in her book, *The Mission*. Wesley Clark, the former NATO commander who was himself such a proconsul in Europe, notes that the regional commanders have control over resources, including the ability to deploy forces or provide training: "By contrast, when an assistant secretary of state comes to the region, he flies on commercial aircraft, arrives with couple of staffers. He doesn't have a separate line on resources." In Latin America, for example, the Pentagon could easily insist that its extensive joint military exercises come under regional OAS auspices. Likewise, in Southeast Asia, Chinese participation would give the ASEAN Regional Forum, known as ARF, the muscle to take over peacekeeping in still-troubled Cambodia.

But without the imprimatur of a U.N. resolution or some other kind of multilateral authorization, most interventions by regional powers would be seen as little more than invasions. True, in some cases, legitimacy might be provided by the participation of NATO or other regional organizations. Kosovo, for instance, provides an example of successful multilateral intervention without Security Council authorization. Yet even there the United Nations came into play, at the end of the 78-day NATO bombing campaign. Milosevic had stood firmer than anyone had expected, and Clinton faced the politically nightmarish prospect of ordering a ground invasion. Washington needed Moscow, Milosevic's only remaining ally, to help persuade him to stand down. And to get Moscow on board, the United States needed the United Nations. Backed by a Security Council resolution and a U.N.-sanctioned peacekeeping force, the Russians proved crucial to Milosevic's eventual submission. NATO, the mightiest regional power in history, still needed U.N. legitimation to achieve what it wanted.

Diplomacy 101

In an era of vast and growing resentment of the world's only superpower, which happily coincides with democratic leadership in most major nations, working to get U.N. legitimation also gives foreign leaders the face they need to sign onto U.S. initiatives. The role of the U.N. Security Council "is huge," says Wesley Clark, "because it enables your friends to do what you want them to do in their own domestic politics." It's true that the equalizing mythology of the United Nations and its Security Council has become harder to sustain as American power has grown; even Bill Clinton, who is now mis-remembered as a starry-eyed multilateralist, came to view the council as a stagnant pool of lost great-power ambitions, a place where a Russia or France could puff themselves up into images of their former selves. But the kind of bitter breakdown on display last February, when the United States and France flailed at each other over Iraq, need not be inevitable as long as American presidents learn the basics of Diplomacy 101 (a class in which George W. Bush apparently didn't even earn his gentleman's C). A little magnanimity would go a long way. Clinton's Balkans unilateralism, after all, also rubbed European nerves raw. But he left office wildly popular in Europe nevertheless. In every crisis, skeptics predict the breakup of the West and its institutions, and in every crisis they are wrong, for one simple reason: The only alternative is anarchy.

When it comes to failed states and humanitarian disasters, it's time for the neocons, Wilsonian idealists, and devotees of realpolitik to get into bed together. In practice, raw force and multilateralism go hand in glove.

Even the United Nations itself has begun to acknowledge the necessity of outsourcing collective security to regional and local muscle. It has also begun to underwrite so-called "wet lease" arrangements, where contributing countries pay for their own peacekeepers (as opposed to traditional dry-lease peacekeeping, where the United Nations supplies everything). According to William Durch, one of the authors of a U.N.-sponsored critique of peacekeeping in 2000, U.N. peacekeepers are as leery of a return to the bad old days of Bosnia as American unilateralists "and are looking toward this hybrid model them-

selves." As the United Nations seeks to downplay its own role in peacekeeping, while regional powers look to take up the slack, regionalizing peacekeeping under multilateral auspices—with America playing the role of guarantor and manager—is poised to become the system of the future.

Yet efforts at regionalization remain unformalized. The State Department is still built around bilateral rather than regional relationships. U.S. ambassadors to nations are far more powerful than their counterparts to regional organizations; within the State Department, weak desk officers run most regional policy. According to Wes Clark, the civilian U.S. government "is not structured properly to deal with the outside world. The committee structure in Congress doesn't reflect the existing division of responsibilities [in the world]. The executive branch doesn't have in it the kinds of organization required to build American security facing outward. The State Department is not just bilateral. It essentially deals with information collection and purveyance. Only in rare cases does it try to influence and act. And even when it does, it doesn't have any real mechanism to do so other than the personal charm of the ambassador. We don't have any action agency in cases where states are failing."

A wrenching record of missed opportunities has already piled up. Had Clinton recognized the possibilities of regional action earlier, for example, he might have exploited the offers from Nigeria, Tanzania, Ghana, and others to send peacekeepers to Rwanda in the early stages of the 1994-95 genocide. In the end, those troops stayed home because they lacked transport and equipment. As journalist Samantha Power notes in her book *A Problem From Hell*, a small number of peacekeepers might have had a deterrent effect: "The Hutu were generally reluctant to massacre large groups of Tutsi if foreigners (armed or unarmed) were present."

When it comes to failed states and humanitarian disasters, it's time for the neocons, Wilsonian idealists, and devotees of realpolitik to get into bed together. In practice, raw force and multilateralism go hand in glove. And it's worth noting that Bush and Clinton alike pushed for more regionalization of conflict resolution. Indeed, one of the very few times Bush had something nice to say about Clinton's foreign policy was during the second presidential debate in 2000, when he praised the administration's decision to train Nigerian troops for intervention in Sierra Leone. Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser, has written that humanitarian interventions "might be better carried out by regional actors, as modeled by the Australian-led intervention in East Timor. The U.S. might be able to lend financial, logistic, and intelligence support." And in June 2001, Rumsfeld authorized a study that recommended establishing "regional joint forces" that could undertake a wide variety of small-scale operations in Europe, the Middle East, or in Asia, in addition to full-scale combat. There is also something of an emerging transatlantic consensus: the French and Germans would certainly prefer to take care of their own backyard—witness the Europeanization of peacekeeping in Bosnia and Kosovo—and British diplomat Robert Cooper has called for an "imperialism of neighbors," which recognizes that for developed countries "instability in your neighborhood poses threats which no state can ignore."

In truth, regionalization is a rediscovered rather than a new idea. The "regional impulse," as scholars Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley call it, was there from the United Nations' founding moments. As early as 1943, Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles proposed to supplement FDR's vision of the four great powers as global policemen with seven regional organizations. Later, Churchill proposed three regional councils, one each for Europe, the Pacific, and the Western Hemisphere, to support the planned Security Council. The U.N. Charter's long-ignored Chapter 8 also provides for the use of regional actors. But few observers have connected the dots between that section and the more commonly used Chapter 7, which dictates responses to threats to the peace. Churchill was enthusiastic about the regional councils because, as he said, "only the countries whose interests were directly affected by a dispute ... could be expected to apply themselves with sufficient vigour to secure a settlement." He was right.

We might also recall the words of one of Churchill's near-contemporaries, Walter Lippman. During the Cold War, the renowned columnist fought titanic battles against American overextension; in the late 1940s he called containment doctrine "a strategic monstrosity." Ultimately, the Vietnam War— containment's bastard child—made Lippman look prescient. In Bosnia and Kosovo under Clinton, and more boldly under George W. Bush, America seems, at long last, to have finally exorcised those ghosts of Vietnam. America has become very, very good at fighting wars efficiently and devastatingly. But we haven't yet figured out how to clean up the new quagmires of the 21st century: the postwar mess. That means the war on terror could easily become a strategic monstrosity if we don't develop a better strategy, and fast.

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