

14. On The Way to Becoming an Imperial Hyperpower? The Manichaeian Trap has Struck Again – U.S. Foreign Policy after September 11, 2001

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the symbol of capitalism and free trade in a globalized world, the World Trade Center in New York, and on the symbol of the global military power of the USA, the Pentagon, revealed, as every war does, the real balance of power. It was the moment of truth—about the all-superior position of the world's only remaining superpower, the insignificance of the UN and NATO and, connected to this, the marginalization of Europe in world politics. Nothing remained of the utopia that NATO would eventually be based on two pillars, one American and one European. The “new NATO” launched at the Prague conference in 2002 will either be functionless or a side project of the U.S. under its control: a side project because 90% of U.S. military potential is used outside of the NATO alliance. NATO Secretary General Robertson has rightly called Europe a “military pygmy.”¹

The U.S., on the other hand, with the exception of its Anglo-Saxon ally Great Britain and some rather token auxiliary nations, has practically single-handedly waged two blitzkriegs and won militarily. In Afghanistan, it took the U.S. a good hundred days, using advanced technology, bombs, about \$70 million in bribes, and only about 500 Americans on the ground, to bring down the Taliban regime and deprive the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda of a territorial base. Against Iraq and Saddam Hussein, the U.S. needed more ground troops in addition to advanced technology, bombs, and bribes, but there things went even faster.

This new military determination of the U.S. under its president George W. Bush and the support of this bellicose policy by the majority

1 “Europe’s Military Mirage,” Stratfor, <http://stratfor.com>, February 5, 2002, 2, quoted from: Walter LaFeber, *The Bush Doctrine*, in *Diplomatic History* ed. 26, no. 4, Fall 2002, p. 554.

First published in: Auf dem Weg zur imperialen Hypermacht? Die manichäische Falle ist besetzt. US-Außenpolitik nach dem 11. September 2001, in: Detlef Junker: *Power and Mission. Was Amerika antreibt*. Verlag Herder Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, pp. 151–174.

of the American people cannot be explained without September 11. The successful terrorist attack struck and shook the American nation on a scale that is difficult to comprehend by peoples who have experienced and survived bombings on a very different scale. Grief, anger, and fear of another attack, including the deep need for revenge, can only be explained by considering that the American people were deprived of a security that until then had been a natural part of the American way of life: territorial integrity. The nuclear threat in the Cold War era had remained largely abstract to the American people because of the successful policy of deterrence. Before that, the well-known joke about the incomparable American security situation applied: bordered to the north and south by weak neighbors, to the east and the west by fish. The terrorists endangered and continue to endanger the paramount goal of U.S. strategy in the 20th century, indeed since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, namely, the security of the continental United States. President Bush's repeated comparison that September 11 was the Pearl Harbor of the 21st century is an understatement. The Japanese attack was about an outpost in the Pacific; the terrorists' attack targeted the symbolic heart of the United States. September 11 therefore fundamentally changed Americans' attitude to life.

The new enemy created clarity. There was a new North Pole on the compass of American globalism. The confusion about the world situation and the associated partial perplexity of U.S. world policy during President Clinton's term evaporated. Now, the Manichean trap of America's sense of mission is filled once again, precisely by international terrorism. American globalism again rests on the triad of fear of an "evil empire," global interests, and the missionary idea of freedom.

The major difference between the administrations of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, therefore, is the militarization of U.S. foreign policy. While, in principle, the three global cornerstones of U.S. national interest—indivisible security, indivisible world market, and indivisible freedom—continues to apply, the military and the ideational components, security and freedom, have clearly gained in importance over the market. It is almost as if in Washington the warriors and priests have displaced the merchants at the top of the U.S. government.

Hand in hand with the militarization of U.S. foreign policy after September 11 goes its unilateralization, i.e., with the proud awareness, which has grown even more since September 11, that it is the world's only remaining superpower, and thereby can represent its interests

alone if necessary – seeking and using allies only if they do what the U.S. wants. In a war coalition, only those who fight on American terms are welcome (a coalition of the willing).

The world has become unipolar from the perspective of President George W. Bush and his influential advisors, predominantly a generation of hawks socialized before the '68 movement. There is no longer a rival power, and that is how the hawks want it to stay. Thus, in the event of conflict, the security of the USA and order in the various regions of the world could not be guaranteed by alliances of equal powers—which no longer exist—nor by international organizations such as the UN and multilateral procedures, but ultimately only by the military power of the USA. Gulliver cannot be bound by multilateral procedures and the shackles of the many dwarfs.

This worldview, developed by the hawks even before September 11, 2001, has been reinforced by terrorism. For only since September 11 have the hawks found the necessary support among the American people; only since September 11 has President George W. Bush been able to wage his two-front war against the actual and alleged terrorists at home and in the world. Only since September 11 has the special nature of his presidency become apparent, namely the permanent state of emergency. Bolstered by the fear and patriotism of the majority of Americans, the majority of the government-compliant mass media, the patriotic pressure to conform in American society, the flight of Congress from foreign policy responsibility, and the inability of Democrats to formulate a discernible alternative, Bush has sought to keep the nation on permanent alert. Politically, his presidency since September 11 has thrived on and through war.

Terrorism, especially in its possible combination with weapons of mass destruction, represents, in President Bush's view, a new kind of threat that can neither be contained nor deterred, but must be destroyed. The United States would have to find a new defensive symmetry in the face of this new threat. Terrorists did not respect borders, he said, so the United States could not either. Therefore, it would have to intervene, preemptively if necessary and alone, in the internal politics of other states. Firstly, he said, that the notion of sovereignty underlying classical international law, also protected dictatorships and secondly that it was a suicidal illusion in the face of this new threat.

The basic elements of the American response to September 11 emerged, as historians amazingly already know, within nine days, between the attack and September 20, 2001, when President Bush

formulated the response to the challenge of terrorism before both houses of Congress. His annual State of the Union address of January 29, 2002, contained no structural news. Even the Manichaeic division of the world into good and evil – symbolized in the “axis of evil” which, in Bush’s view was formed by the states of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea – tended to be present in his September 14 speech at the Washington Cathedral and the September 20, 2001, address to Congress.

Historians are so exquisitely informed about the White House decision-making processes of September 11–20 because two journalists, Dan Balz and famed Watergate veteran Bob Woodward, published a stunning insider’s story in eight installments in the “Washington Post” from January 27 to February 3, 2002, based on extensive interviews and conversations with all the key participants, including President Bush. Although journalists cautioned readers that this story was necessarily incomplete and that some items were not to be discussed by key participants in order not to jeopardize national security and the confidentiality of the deliberations, the central elements of the U.S. response and its motives can be reconstructed with great clarity. For this reconstruction, the historian uses his usual tools: internal and external source criticism, comparison of verbatim quotations from the center of power with public pronouncements and concrete actions, integration of the hypotheses obtained in the experiential, (i.e., rule knowledge) of the interpreter about his subject. Moreover, the insights and facts from the two journalists’ reporting are an excellent key to understanding President Bush’s public speeches. Bob Woodward has published a version in book form, shortened for the first days and supplemented in substance until the end of the war in Afghanistan, which has also been translated into German.²

There is the astute observation that in matters of politics and world history, politicians have the first word, journalists the second, political scientists the third, but historians the last. In this case, the word has passed surprisingly quickly to the historians.

The central political decisions that are still valid today began to be made by President Bush on that chaotic September 11, when he had difficulties returning to the White House from Florida by way of Nebraska. These decisions were spontaneous; they came, as it were, from his gut, or to put it more delicately, from the core of his being. There is a photograph of President Bush as he was handed the news of

2 Bob Woodward, *Amerika im Krieg*, Stuttgart / Munich 2003.

the attack on the second tower, the South Tower, of the World Trade Center shortly after 9 a.m. local time in an elementary school in Sarasota. Bush's gaze goes inward and into the distance at the same time. Later, he says of the situation: "It was at that moment that I realized we were going to war." The early decisions were not significantly modified by the deliberations of the next few days. In general, it must be said that Bush, to the surprise of many, was the driving force and, of course, by virtue of his office, decisive person on the American side and probably remains so to this day. What were the president's spontaneous insights and reactions on September 11?

The attack, Bush said, is not just an act of terrorism; the attack means war, and war with potentially worldwide dimensions. When CIA Director George J. Tenet pointed out to Bush on September 11 that he had a 60-country problem with regard to terrorism, Bush replied that he would "take on" one country at a time. September 11, Bush said, was a beacon, the Pearl Harbor of the 21st century. Already on that day, without even asking his Secretary of State Colin Powell, he also formulated that strategy, which then became known as the "Bush Doctrine." Like every self-respecting American president who wants to go down in history, Bush formulated a doctrine. Its content: The American government would make no distinction in the coming war between terrorists who commit the crimes and those who provide them with a safe haven. Moreover, he would force the whole world to take political and moral sides: Either you are for us, or you are for the terrorists.

Over the next few days, other elements of the American response became apparent. The nation and the world would have to be prepared for a long war. The response, he said, would have to be hard, spectacular, and really hit the terrorists. "The American people," Bush said, "want a Big Bang." Clinton's tactic of firing a few cruise missiles against suspected terrorists to calm U.S. public opinion was woefully inadequate, he said. The world and terrorists, Bush said, must be disabused of the impression that the U.S. is a materialistic and hedonistic country unwilling to fight for its security, its interests, and the world's freedom.

Bush agreed with his advisers – including Vice President "Dick" Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, Chief of Staff Henry H. Shelton, Attorney General John D. Ashcroft, his Chief of Staff Andrew H. Card, CIA Director George Tenet, and the highly influential National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice – that the United States needed to forge a global

coalition against terrorism, but only on terms that would be set in Washington. Bush did speak in small circles about how the righteousness of the American cause would bring the world to the U.S. side, but at the same time he made clear that the American mission would have to define the coalition, not the other way around. Several times in these internal debates, Bush emphasized that the United States would fight alone if necessary.

On Sunday, Sept. 15, he conferred, as his father once did before the Gulf War decision, with his closest advisers at the presidential country estate in Maryland, at Camp David. To them, the president said of the coming war on terrorism, “We may be the only ones left at some point. I don’t mind that. We are America.” This statement troubled Secretary of State Powell, who was responsible for implementing the Bush administration’s decision to forge an international coalition in the war on terrorism and to maintain at least the appearance of multilateralism. However, to the general amusement of those at the Cabinet meeting the day before, Powell reported on the phone calls he had already made to 35 governments in the morning. So much multilateralism, Powell said, had almost made him seasick.

The operational and strategic decisions were also made in the discussions in those first days – this fact being a renewed proof of the ability of the American political system to make decisions even, and especially, in times of crisis. One must not think about what would have happened if the attack had targeted London, Paris, Rome, or Berlin. This included the decision to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan in order to destroy Bin Laden and the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda. Only after several days of controversial deliberations was a simultaneous attack on Iraq postponed. Chief of Staff General Shelton was particularly opposed to an attack on Iraq, saying there was no evidence to date that Iraq was responsible for terrorism. Powell, too, was troubled that Cheney, Rumsfeld, and his deputy, Wolfowitz, continued to raise the issue of Iraq for debate over the next several months.

To achieve the war objective in Afghanistan, the toughest war plan proposed by Shelton was put into effect by President Bush, namely, to intervene in Afghanistan with cruise missiles, with bombers, and also with special forces on the ground. At the same time, Bush signed an executive order authorizing the CIA to expand and intensify its clandestine activities in 80 states on an unprecedented scale. The massive increase in the amount of money for bribes was the most peaceful measure. CIA Director Tenet had brought with him to Camp David a

master plan, titled “World Wide Attack Matrix,” outlining the secret strategies in those 80 countries. Bush was so enthusiastic after his CIA chief’s presentation that he exclaimed, “Great job!”

Finally, it is clear from the analysis of this internal deliberation that President Bush’s deep-seated Manichaeism, the dividing of the world into good and evil, is not an imposed public gesture, but belongs to the core of his political worldview. The war, Bush told his closest advisers, is a monumental struggle between good and evil, a crusade that will define his presidency and his image in history. Bush’s chief speechwriter, Michael Gerson, testified that he had never seen the president so full of passion as when he was preparing his Sept. 20 speech, which he and his colleagues had to rewrite a few times at Bush’s suggestion and which Bush himself corrected line by line. Emphasizing his excitement, Bush told Gerson two days before the speech, “This will define my presidency.” After the speech, which was watched live on screen by 80 million of the 281 million Americans, Bush told Gerson, “I’ve never felt so at peace with myself in my life.”

Bush has found his mission, which is far from over: the destruction of evil, if necessary, in a long war; ensuring the future security of the U.S. through preventive operations – if necessary, anywhere in the world – and through the strictest security measures at home. This war can last a long time, if necessary, as long as World War II or the Cold War. For Bush, September 11 must not be repeated. That is why Bush told Congress on September 20, “This is not, however, just America’s fight. And what is at stake is not just America’s freedom. This is the world’s fight. This is civilization’s fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance, and freedom. ... The civilized world is rallying to America’s side. They understand that if this terror goes unpunished, their own cities, their own citizens may be next. ... The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them. Fellow citizens, we’ll meet violence with patient justice—assured of the rightness of our cause, and confident of the victories to come. In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom, and may He watch over the United States of America.”³

3 George W. Bush, Address to the joint session of the 107th Congress, United States capitol, Washington, D.C. September 20, 2001.

There is now a well-founded suspicion that September 11 became an opportunity within world history for a highly influential group of public officials and political strategists, who in an unprecedented act of power grabbing “kidnapped” the White House, as it were, and reached the heart and mind of the President, to do what they had envisioned in their publications and memoranda in the 1990s: establish an unrivaled Pax Americana for the 21st century. This group does not want to establish an American hegemony, but a world primacy that will allow the U.S. to determine the structures of the world in a pro-American sense for the indefinite future.

Their special position in terms of power politics is also reflected in the fact that, in the event of conflict, these revolutionaries are prepared to intervene militarily, if necessary, in the internal politics of other states, but they themselves would never dream of renouncing the central element of the modern state as it has evolved since the 17th century: national sovereignty. They insist on autonomy from outside forces, self-determination in politics, and the ability to act unilaterally. These revolutionaries are unwilling to allow U.S. freedom of choice to be constrained by international law and international agreement if it contradicts what they believe to be the U.S. national interest.

The refusal to let the U.S. be bound by the Kyoto Protocols for the protection of the environment or by an international court in the prosecution of war crimes and human rights violations are prominent examples. In this respect, an ocean separates the conservative revolutionaries from the political class and culture of Germany, which is sworn wholeheartedly to peace, multilateralism, the juridification of international relations, and self-containment. For the representatives of the chosen people, on the other hand, morality comes first, then legality.

World dominance is to be based on global military dominance at sea, in the air, and in space, including military bases that have now spread around the world. This new dominance also makes it possible to satisfy the paramount principle of American warfare and the expectation of the American people to use as few of their own troops as possible in land warfare and to risk as few American lives as possible. At the same time, this new dominance reduces dependence on military confederates as in World War II, when Russian soldiers decimated German divisions and were expected to destroy Japanese armies in mainland China in the final phase of the war. In addition, development of the missile defense programs begun by President Reagan continues.

Further, the United States, barely noticed by the public, retracted its pledge in the spring of 2002 not to attack non-nuclear powers with nuclear weapons. The primary goal of this strategy is to make the U.S. secure against any attack, if possible, while at the same time keeping every part of the world open to American intervention. In doing so, they produce a classic security dilemma: the more absolute security for the U.S. becomes, the more absolute is the insecurity for the rest of the world.

For the conservative revolutionaries, the unassailable military advantage is the basis of future American world supremacy. They also count on the weight of the American economy, the influence of American popular culture, shifting alliances, and the appeal of the American promise of freedom.

The term “world supremacy” can be used to adequately describe this new utopia because it allows us to distinguish it, on the one hand, from the goal of “world domination” and, on the other hand, from the hegemonic role as the leading power of the Western world in the Cold War. In the self-concept of the world supremacy ideologues, the collapse of the Soviet Union, removed the need for the U.S. to play the role of the “benevolent hegemon” as it did during the Cold War, that is, to take into account the interests of the dependent allies within the framework of its leadership role, to use dialogue to level out differences of interest through pragmatic compromises, and to achieve voluntary allegiance on this basis. It is not without reason that during the Cold War American foreign policy toward Western Europe in general, and Germany in particular, could be described as “empire by invitation” or “empire by integration.”⁴ World supremacy is no longer hegemony and not yet world domination, it lies somewhere in between, the exact position changing due to the changing framework of world politics.

If the U.S. succeeded in doing so in the next few decades, it would become—in the sense of world supremacy—an imperial hyperpower with global reach. By comparison, the Roman Empire was a regional power centered around the Mediterranean and, even at the height of its influence, only one among several empires that stretched from the Atlantic Ocean across all of Eurasia to the Pacific Ocean, such as the empire of the Parthians and Kushana.⁵

4 Cf. Geir Lundestad, *The American “Empire,”* Oxford 1990.

5 Nevertheless, it may be useful to compare the structures of the Roman Empire with those of the New Rome. Cf. Peter Bender, *Weltmacht Amerika – Das Neue Rom,* Stuttgart 2003.

The inner circle of leaders around Bush reads like a “Who’s Who?” of these ideologues of American world supremacy.⁶ It includes what many consider the most influential politicians after the president, his vice president Dick Cheney, his chief of staff I. Lewis Libby, and his national security adviser, Eric Edelman; Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, and his adviser, Richard Perle; Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and State Department Undersecretary of Defense John Bolton; and, of course, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, who has more than anyone else the scarcest commodity in an imperial presidency: constant access to the president, not only at the White House but also at Camp David and in Texas. As early as the 2000 campaign, Bush, then inexperienced in foreign policy, confessed that no one could explain foreign policy to him better than Condoleezza Rice.

Before the start of the presidential campaign in 2000 which was focused entirely on domestic politics, George W. Bush was a blank slate with regard to foreign policy and had traveled around the world less than many Heidelberg history students. If one measures the president himself, based on his public statements and deeds, then he has largely adopted the world view of the world supremacist ideologues. Much the same can be said of his security adviser Condoleezza Rice. Given the missionary zeal with which this group pursues its goals, one may assume that almost all leadership positions in the White House and the crucial departments have now been purged of Clinton’s people. There are said to still be islands of resistance in the State Department, whose head Colin Powell, despite the most serious differences with these unilateralist hawks, as a loyal soldier, patriotic American, and ambitious politician, has so far failed to do what the president considers a primal political sin: expose the strife within the government to the outside world. The president does not allow domestic critics into the White House, and he reacts to public criticism with insult and resentment, especially when his moral integrity and the legitimacy of his mission are called into question.

Exchanging views with the Bush administration and moving within its sphere of influence, a circle of historians, strategists, commentators, and analysts, spread the new world view through their books and think tanks: besides William Kristol, Eliot A. Cohen, Lawrence F. Kaplan,

6 A good overview is provided by Stefan Fröhlich, *Hegemonialer Internationalismus*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10.4.2003, no. 85, p. 8.

Victor Davis Hanson, Bernard Lewis, there is also Robert Kagan, who surprised the world with the insight that the Americans are from Mars (warlike and capable of action), while the Europeans are from Venus (peaceable and incapable of action).⁷ There is also Francis Fukuyama, a former “Hegel in the State Department,” who announced as early as 1992 that world history had come to its end because there was no longer any possible and morally justified alternative to the Western-American model of the market and freedom for the entire world.⁸

These ideologues of American world supremacy are literate and historically aware. They ponder the rise and fall of previous world empires, looking for analogies, lessons, and instructions for action from history in order to avoid, if possible, the future fall of the new American empire. Power politicians plunder classics such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes; military strategists wonder how the U.S. might avoid a new Pearl Harbor or a second September 11 under modern conditions of asymmetric warfare,⁹ and natural law scholars discover philosophers such as Leo Strauss to place America’s libertarian mission on a moral footing.

Around the world, this group has come to be called “neoconservatives” (neocons). It would be more appropriate to call them “conservative revolutionaries.” They are “conservative” in the sense that they want to “preserve” exactly what has been described and explained in this book: the special, global position of political power of the USA as a result of the history of the 20th century—and the American missionary idea of freedom, the civil religion of America as it has developed since the 18th century, i.e., America’s power and mission.

Anyone who reads the self-reflections of the ideologues of American world supremacy or the official interpretation of the world from the White House in September 2002 immediately discovers that it would be quite wrong to quote only the passages dealing with the political power aspects of the new American unilateralism and to interpret the civil religion of freedom merely as rhetoric or false consciousness – as is the custom in secularized Europe and Germany. The reality of the US’s political power is also understood by the Bush administration as a vision and an idea.

7 Robert Kagan, *Macht und Ohnmacht. Amerika und Europa in der neuen Weltordnung*, Berlin 2003.

8 Francis Fukuyama, *Das Ende der Geschichte: Wo stehen wir?*, Munich 1992.

9 Cf. Herfried Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege*, Hamburg 2002.

These conservatives are “revolutionary” in the sense that, after the end of the bipolar world of the Cold War, they want to abolish the core principle of their own constitution, the separation and intertwining of powers (checks and balances), in international politics and establish the USA permanently as the only remaining and unrivaled superpower. This is indeed a revolutionary utopia, conceived in the face of all experience and probability. This utopia is at the same time driven by deep fear, fear of chaos, of the confusion and plurality of the world, indeed of the devil and the forces of evil. Lurking in the depths of these seemingly cold power politicians is the fear of the end of the American dream. And it is no coincidence that there are signs that the principle of separation of powers could also be eroded in domestic politics with the creeping erosion of civil liberties.

Anyone who wants to understand these “conservative revolutionaries” need only take the trouble to read a good hundred pages of text that are publicly available and accessible via the Internet: first, a summary strategy paper of the world’s supremacist thinkers published during and for the 2000 election campaign; a paper for a future Pax Americana that leaves nothing to be desired in terms of—brutal—explicitness and clarity.¹⁰ And second, the official National Security Memorandum published by the White House on September 17, 2002.¹¹

The conservative strategists’ electoral starting point in 2000 was a critique of what they saw as Clinton’s disjointed and clueless foreign policy after the end of the Cold War. The time for experimentation and fumbling around was over, they said. In their view, Clinton had no vision for America’s future role in the world. The tragedies of the 20th century, they claimed, had amply demonstrated what happens when the U.S. lets things drift and does not take the lead in the world—a clear allusion to U.S. policy in the period between the two world wars. The U.S. had a vital role to play in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

The political consequence of this new definition of America’s place was the demand for a massive rearmament and modernization of the

10 Rebuilding America’s Defenses. Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century. A Report of The Project for the New American Century, September 2000, 76 pages, <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>.

11 The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, the White House, Washington D.C., 31 pages, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/200211001-6.html. For an abridged German translation, see: *Internationale Politik* 12 (2002), pp. 113–138. Citations after this translation.

American armed forces, including a reorganization of the Pentagon. This opportunity could also be seized because, for the first time in forty years, there would be a running surplus in the federal budget. While President Clinton had announced that this surplus would be used in the future to expand social security systems, the new strategists saw this as a golden opportunity to finance military spending in the future.

President Bush has followed precisely this master plan in his actual policies. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's public pronouncements, insofar as they do not refer to current situations, are variations on this basic tune, often hymns to the new quality and future global significance of American forces. From the perspective of conservative revolutionaries, the lightning-fast victories against Afghanistan and Iraq are triumphant confirmations of the new strategy.

Another leitmotif of the conservative revolutionaries, even in the early 1990s, was a sharp criticism of the Middle East policies of George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. They considered it a strategic mistake of the highest degree not to have toppled Saddam Hussein and his regime when the opportunity to do so had presented itself in 1991 during the first Gulf War. For, in their view, the entire region must be reshaped from the ground up if the U.S. was to secure its strategic interests in the long term, and if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was to be resolved after more than fifty years of unsuccessful crisis diplomacy.

Based on this strategy, which was already formulated in the 1990s, there are good reasons to suspect that the official justification presented to the UN and the world for the attack against Iraq, a threat to the U.S. from weapons of mass destruction, was only a pretext and that the attack must be interpreted as part of an overall strategic plan for a reorganization of the Middle East. The threat analysis concocted by the intelligence agencies had, it seems, the same purpose as Roosevelt's assertions in 1941 that the Nazis wanted to bring Latin America under their control and ultimately attack the United States itself. Once again, the threats to U.S. security and the Western Hemisphere were exaggerated in order to scare the American people (zooming in the enemy).

However, the U.S.' worldwide loss of reputation associated with this possible deception and breach of international law comes up against an administration that not only has the sole power to act, but also feels morally in the right. For while the basic strategic document of 2000 speaks more of power than of mission, President George W. Bush opens the preface to the national security strategy of September 17, 2002, with a manifesto of the natural law-based, civil-religious mission

of freedom, with a motif that runs through the entire document: “The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise. In the twenty-first century, only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity. People everywhere want to be able to speak freely; choose who will govern them; worship as they please; educate their children—male and female; own property; and enjoy the benefits of their labor. These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society—and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages.”¹²

Elsewhere in the document, it says, “Finally, the United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe.” “Freedom is the non-negotiable demand of human dignity; the birthright of every person—in every civilization.” “The United States must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere.”¹³

As is well known, the vast majority of America’s attempts to establish democratic regimes through or after military intervention and to consolidate them in the long term have failed. According to a new study,¹⁴ out of 16 attempts of this kind in the 20th century, only four have been successful, namely in West Germany and Japan, with some cutbacks in the small states of Grenada and Panama. Successful means that ten years after the withdrawal of U.S. troops, democracy still existed. From this perspective, too, the democratization of the old German Federal Republic is one of the greatest success stories of U.S. foreign policy in the 20th century. It is no coincidence that President Bush constantly made comparisons with Germany and Japan in the run-up to the Iraq War. This comparison will almost certainly prove to be false. Iraq, and probably Afghanistan, will add to the long list of failed American attempts to bring freedom to peoples and states by force: Haiti, Cambodia, South Vietnam, the Dominican Republic,

12 Ibid, p. 113.

13 Ibid., p. 114 ff.

14 Minxin Pei/Sara Kasper, *Lessons from the Past. The American Record on Nation Building*, in: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Brief, 24 May 2003.

Cuba, Nicaragua, and Panama from 1903 to 1996. This assessment is true whether the United States leaves the authority and cost of such an attempt to the UN or goes it alone in “nation building.”

But that will not prevent the USA from trying again and again. For it is in the nature of secular utopia that, like religion, it does not allow its utopian surplus, its core of hope, to be destroyed by bad reality and unpleasant facts. This is also true for America’s civil-religious missionary idea of freedom. The hope for a better future, the belief in a new chance, progress, and the improvement of the human race characterize this sense of mission. Bush, too, belongs to the generations of Americans who interpret the history of their own chosen people as a success story toward ever greater freedom. The Security Memorandum states, “Our own history is a long struggle to live up to our ideals. But even in our worst moments, the principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence were there to guide us. As a result, America is not just a stronger, but is a freer and more just society.”

President Bush is obviously deeply convinced that his mission is to universalize these American values. In the memorandum’s programmatic aspiration to expand the zones of free and market states, there is a large, common intersection with the policies of his predecessors, from Woodrow Wilson to Bill Clinton. Unlike his more pragmatic father, who had major problems with “*the vision thing*,” Bush confided to journalist Bob Woodward in a conversation at his ranch in Texas that his greatest desire was to fight for “world peace.” Every person, he said, has the ability to leave the earth better than he found it.¹⁵ Like President Woodrow Wilson or Franklin D. Roosevelt, he would have no trouble applying one of Abraham Lincoln’s famous sayings to a global scale: the world could not be half free and half enslaved. Asked about the discrepancy between ideal and reality, he could, like Roosevelt in 1943, counter his critics who thought the ideals of his “four freedoms” and the Atlantic Charter were nonsensical because unrealizable: If these people had lived 150 years ago, they would have scoffed at the Declaration of Independence, almost a thousand years earlier they would have laughed at the Magna Carta, and several thousand years earlier they would have poured out their derision on Moses when he came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments.¹⁶

15 Bob Woodward, *Bush at War. America at War*, Stuttgart / Munich 2003, p. 374 ff.

16 Detlef Junker, *Franklin D. Roosevelt. Macht und Vision. Präsident in Kriegszeiten*. Göttingen, second Ed. 1989, p. 133 f.

Indeed, George W. Bush has responded similarly to his opponents: “Today, these ideals are a lifeline for the lonely defenders of freedom. When it comes to opening up a society, we can support the changes, as we did in Central and Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 or in Belgrade in 2000. When we see democratic processes taking root among our friends in Taiwan or the Republic of Korea, and elected politicians replacing generals in Latin America and Africa, we see examples of where authoritarian systems can go when a country’s history and tradition combine with the principles we hold so dear.”¹⁷

It is therefore exceedingly significant how the president wants to unite power and vision in a better future. The goal of his foreign policy, the security memorandum states several times, is “a balance of power that favors freedom.” It is the goal of this strategy, it says, to make the world not just safer but better. Even the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be resolved only on the basis of freedom, he said: “There can be no peace for either side in the Middle East without freedom on both sides.”¹⁸

Embedded in this vision of freedom is the hard political power blueprint of U.S. world supremacy, the future of a state that will act alone, if necessary, without regard to international law, and “preemptively.” “The United States will act preemptively, if necessary, to thwart or forestall such hostile acts by our adversaries.”¹⁹

However, this missionary idea of freedom only gains its power from the fact that Bush not only wants to advance the inner-worldly progress towards more and more freedom, but also proclaims this progress in the name of God. Only this connection makes the idea of freedom a civil-religious mission, makes Bush a freedom warrior in the name of God or God warrior in the name of freedom. He thus stands, as shown in this book, in America’s oldest tradition.²⁰

17 Cf. note 11, p. 117.

18 Ibid, p. 120.

19 Ibid, p. 125.

20 From the endless literature on this subject, see especially: Mark A. Noll, *America’s God. From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, Oxford 2002; Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny. American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*, New York 1995; Michael Adas, *From Settler Colony to Global Hegemon: Interpreting the Exceptionalist Narrative of the American Experience into World History*, in: *American Historical Review* (Dec. 2001), pp. 1692–1720. For further reading, see Knud Krakau, *Exzeptionalismus – Verantwortung – Auftrag. Atlantische Wurzeln und politische Grenzen der demokratischen Mission Amerikas*, in: Alois Mosser (ed.) »Gottes auserwählte Völker«. *Erwählungsvorstellungen und kollektive Selbstfindung in der Geschichte*, Frankfurt / M. 2001, pp. 89–116.

It is by no means, as the German President Johannes Rau suspects, a “grandiose misunderstanding” when President Bush speaks of America’s divine mission, but a core element of American identity. Despite the separation of church and state, the USA is a religious country with an infinite variety of churches and concepts of God.

Depending on one’s perspective, one can consider the civil-religious missionary idea of freedom a particularly successful combination of Christianity and the Enlightenment, deplore it as a sign that the U.S.’ process of secularization is stuck, or, like the pope, countless representatives of Protestant churches, and millions of Christians around the world, condemn the divine justification of American wars as a theological scandal – but the historian’s task is not to judge, but to describe and explain.

For centuries, European visitors to the United States in particular have been continually amazed and struck by the country’s public religion of virtue, a blend of common sense, Protestant theology, and Christian republicanism. At the beginning of the 19th century, for example, a liberal Catholic nobleman from France, Alexis de Tocqueville, marveled: “Protestantism is a democratic doctrine that precedes and facilitates the establishment of social and political equality. Men have, as it were, passed democracy through heaven before they established it on earth.”²¹ A century later, the English writer G. K. Chesterton called America a “nation with the soul of a church.”

President George W. Bush differs from many of his predecessors, including his father, only in the forcefulness with which he speaks the name of God while using it for his political purposes. Bush had a Pauline-like conversion experience in 1986, at the age of 40.²² Since then, he has studied the Bible among his friends and never tires of giving public testimony of his rebirth, which he experienced through the shaking of his soul. This freed him from alcohol and probably saved his marriage. Since this rebirth, he has led a godly, disciplined, healthy, and purposeful life. The son of a prominent father with only moderate success in his studies and career, who could always rely on the financial protection of his influential father’s rich friends in times of crisis, became a successful governor of Texas, then managed to

21 Alexis de Tocqueville, quoted in: Otto Kallscheuer, *Erwachen. Ein nötiger Blick auf die amerikanische Zivilreligion*, in: *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 12.04.2003.

22 A good summary report on this problem is the cover story of *Newsweek* from 10.3.2003: “Bush & God. How Faith Changed His Life and Shapes His Agenda,” pp. 14–21.

become president of the United States and thereby the most powerful man in the world. Bush certainly seems to associate this success with his rebirth.

It can be assumed that President Bush experienced a second, political rebirth on and through September 11. Bush, who came into office semi-legitimately through electoral sloppiness and vote rigging, whose presidency before September 11 remained without impressive contours, suffered from declining approval ratings and—through a defector—from the loss of the Republican majority in the Senate, has now, through the historical fight against terrorism, found his new mission of freedom in the name of God.

His rebirth also proved extraordinarily opportune in terms of domestic politics. It gave him access to the Christian right and to the evangelical revivalist movement, which, starting from the U.S. South, has become a political power in the last 30 years, with its members occupying more and more key positions in Washington. This revival movement can be considered the fourth of its kind in the history of the colonies and the United States. “Awakening and conversion” never remained confined to the private sphere, but each time influenced the American polity and generated a spiritually shaped public sphere. The first revival movement in the 18th century was among the preconditions of the American Revolution; the second revival movement in the early 19th century fed the general democratization of the United States and the energies of the abolitionists, a largely Christian freedom movement against slavery. The third movement proclaimed a “social gospel” that found particular expression in the social policy programs of the New Deal under President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s.

What the outcome of this fourth revival movement will be is still difficult to predict. What is certain is that soon after his revival, President Bush discovered how politically useful it was for consolidating and broadening his power base and that of the Republicans, first in Texas and then in the United States. In this sense, too, Bush embodies the symbiosis of power and mission. His speeches are peppered with biblical quotations, and there is much prayer in the White House and Cabinet. He supports political demands of faith-based organizations; for example, financial aid for denominational schools. Such a policy is extremely controversial politically and constitutionally, given the separation of church and state.

Methodist George W. Bush, however, does not seem to be among the millions of Americans who, in light of September 11, 2001, are once

again living with an expectation of the end of the world and calling on everyone to repent before it is too late. Nor did he get involved in the debate between the “pre-Millenarians” and the “post-Millenarians” who are fiercely arguing over whether the Millennial Kingdom will be established before or after the Second Coming of Christ. He did, however, stir up a small storm of indignation in 1993 when he told a—Jewish—reporter that only those who believed in Jesus would go to heaven.

What is significant for the world outside the U.S. is that George W. Bush derives strength, determination, a sense of mission, and a certain measure of destiny from his faith. He means what he says when he proclaimed in his January 28, 2003, State of the Union (and the World): “The liberty we prize is not America’s gift to the world; it is God’s gift to humanity.”²³ President Bush, neither a theologian nor an intellectual, neither particularly educated nor particularly proficient in extemporaneous speech in the American language, is a popular president in his country. He is popular with the majority of Americans not only because he acts, shows leadership, and perfectly orchestrates his presidency with the help of media advisors and mass media, but also because he credibly represents the trinity of America: God, country, and freedom. How long this support of the American president by the American people will last and whether he will actually succeed in establishing an American world supremacy for a long time, nobody can predict. For predictions about the future could only be made if there were no more future...

23 The President’s State of the Union Address, Jan. 28, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/20030128-19.html>.

