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NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

**LEAD, FOLLOW, OR GET OUT OF THE WAY**

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The United States stands alone at a critical crossroad in the evolutionary and revolutionary journey of the nation-state system. As the sole surviving superpower, at the close of the most war-ravaged century in the history of mankind, we possess the opportunity to decide which path we will pursue into the next millennium. Our choices are basic: lead, follow, or get out of the way. Superficially, all of these choices appear as realistic philosophies of statecraft; however, a deeper analysis reveals that assuming the leadership role is fundamentally idealistic. Considering the savage history of the nation-state system, the United States has an obligation to pursue a philosophy of statecraft that promotes our humanistic values if we are to survive and progress as a race of people in the global community.

### American Values

Traditional American values are difficult to describe. As a nation of immigrants, our values can best be characterized by the indomitable spirit of the frontier pioneers who tamed our vast continent. We perceive ourselves to be honest, God-fearing, freedom-loving, and law-abiding; we willingly take risks and accept new challenges; we feel compelled to help a neighbor in need; and above all, we strive to live in peace but will fight for our liberty. This persona has shaped the way, we as a nation, conduct our affairs with neighbors in the global community. As stated in our National Security Strategy, America promotes the core values of:

Representative governance, free market economics and respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law, creating new opportunities to promote peace, prosperity and greater cooperation among nations. <sup>1</sup>

Although we proclaim these as traditional American values, in reality, they are becoming the values of most people in the global community.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, there exists a growing strain of Americans who selfishly desire to retreat from our traditional idealistic value of helping neighbors. Several national figures are attempting to dissuade the American people from fulfilling our responsibilities as leaders of the global community. These political voices are promoting a more realistic philosophy of statecraft that is far less risky than the course of international engagement we are currently pursuing. They propose sharing the responsibilities of global leadership in a multi-polar world where the United States can compete, from an advantageous position, without risk to our domestic luxuries. These--self-anointed--prophets are warning that of the evils of our current national strategy of engagement will evolve into

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<sup>1</sup> *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, (Washington, D.C., The White House, 1998), 1.

entanglement and choke precious life from the United States. In the following paragraphs we will examine why the United States, as the current world leader, has an obligation to pursue a philosophy of statecraft that promotes our humanistic values. We will also explore how the United States shall maintain its idealistic role as the world leader to support security and prosperity in the global community.

### Leadership Cycle

The concept of a single leader in the global community appears contradictory to the nation-state system. The Peace of Westphalia, in 1648, codified the nation-state system under two principles of international law: (1) the government of each country is unequivocally sovereign within its territorial jurisdiction and (2) countries shall not interfere in each other's domestic affairs.<sup>3</sup> However, during the past three and a half centuries, there has existed a recurring cycle of international leadership. Historical evidence supports an international model that describes the rise of a new world leader following each major period of international warfare. Each world leader, within the international model, developed a philosophy of statecraft to support a world order that flourished for decades before being replaced by another hegemon.<sup>4</sup>

Following the Thirty Years War in 1648, the Dutch emerged as leaders of the "civilized world". The Dutch Republic operated under a representative form of government and promoted liberal international trade. By employing a system of voluntary alliances and aggressive international commerce, the Dutch maintained their leadership position until 1713. Through a series of wars and revolutions, the Spanish and French attempted to ascend to the hegemonic status but fell short due to weak economic systems and dictatorial governments. In 1815, following the Napoleonic Wars, Britain arose as the next international leader. The British modified their monarchy to establish a stable parliamentary form of government. After painful economic lessons, the British adopted a liberal system of international trade. The British reigned supreme until the end of World War I, when they were militarily and economically devastated. The latest world power to evolve in the hegemonic cycle is the United States. During the "War-to-end-all-Wars" the United States demonstrated international prowess and survived as the sole military and economic power.<sup>5</sup> Although visionary in our efforts to establish a world organization--the

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<sup>2</sup> The report of The Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighborhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1998), 48-54.

<sup>3</sup> Seyom Brown, *International Relations in a Changing Global System* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1996), 69.

League of Nations--we lacked the national resolve to see our dream come to fruition and the maturity to accept our responsibilities as true world leaders.

### The Challenge of Leadership

Between the two great wars of this century the United States sat on the international sidelines. Although we were undisputed heavyweight champions of the world, we chose to practice a philosophy of statecraft where we could get out of the way and follow the previous hegemonic leader. Unfortunately, Great Britain no longer possessed the tools of statecraft to exercise world leadership. Our isolationist philosophy helped fuel an international economic collapse and encouraged the rise of expansionist dictators. The devastation and horrors of another world war were required to awaken the selfless spirit of international leadership within the United States.

Technically the United States cannot be blamed for the Great Depression or for the rise of expansionist nation-state philosophies such as German Nazism, Italian fascism, or Japanese Imperialism. However, a case can be made that had the United States shown the same world leadership, following World War I, that we are demonstrating today, it is possible that Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito may have been thwarted from their aggressive expansionist and destructive adventures. Historians and political scientists may argue that this concept is farfetched. Nonetheless, when the United States finally accepted the challenge of international leadership and took the risk to help neighbors, we rebuilt Europe and Japan into flourishing economies. Likewise, when the United States stood firm on our freedom-loving values and democratic principles against the threat of world Communism, we prevailed to make the global community safer and more prosperous. Within this decade alone the United States has taken the international lead to thwart the aggression of rogue leaders such as Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic. At great risk to American lives and cost to national treasury, the United States has led numerous peace keeping and humanitarian missions to nations such as Somalia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Liberia, and Haiti. The United States cannot set back the clock and retreat to a philosophy of neo-isolationism. As demonstrated during the past 50 years, the United States has an obligation to promote our humanistic values through international leadership in order to enhance security and prosperity throughout the global community.

### Tangible Leadership

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<sup>4</sup> Mark R. Brawley, *Liberal Leadership, Great Powers and Their Challenges in Peace and War* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 2-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-40,99,109-116,149-181.

There are no guarantees as to how long the United States will remain the sole super-power. A Herculean effort is required to maintain our leadership position and promote our humanistic values. We will only be permitted to remain the world leader so long as members of the global community willingly support and follow our leadership. In the past, independent nation-states followed the United States for tangible reasons. For half a century, the United States has demonstrated the following tangible leadership attributes: (1) Power. Our combination of natural and social determinates verify that we are the most physically powerful nation by all quantifiable measures.<sup>6</sup> (2) Representative Government. We practice a democratically elected republican form of government that abides by the rule of law. The United States spearheaded the establishment of the United Nations based on a representative system of the member states. History reveals that independent nation-states will not follow a monarch or dictator unless threatened. (3) Free Market Economics. We promote a system of international free trade where all nations have the opportunity to prosper.

These tangible precepts of international leadership supported Dutch and British dominance for decades. Like our hegemonic predecessors, over time our tangible elements of leadership are beginning to erode from wear and tear. For example, American physical power in the forms of natural resources and population are beginning to show decline. The United States continues to become more dependent on foreign oil; in the past six years, our import requirement for oil has risen from 43 to 51%.<sup>7</sup> Although we maintain substantial domestic oil reserves, a sudden loss of foreign oil or drastic price increase will impact all aspects of American life as witnessed during the 1974 and 1980 oil crises. Traditionally, population is considered a source of state power.<sup>8</sup> The current population in the United States is 272.5 million;<sup>9</sup> by 2050, our population is estimated to reach 349.3 million. Although this growth appears impressive, China--a potential adversary--has a population of 1.2 billion with an estimated increase to 1.4 billion by 2050.<sup>10</sup> If a future conflict arises--such as a nuclear exchange--the United States will be at a disadvantage during a war of pure attrition. Another measure of American power is the United States military. For over forty years the United States, as leader of the free world, stood toe-to-toe with the

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<sup>6</sup> David Jablonsky, "National Power," *Parameters* (Spring 1997): 38-49.

<sup>7</sup> "Last year's oil imports more than half of U.S. supplies," *The Energy Wire* (10 September 1999): 2, [www.anwr.org/features/imprthlf.htm](http://www.anwr.org/features/imprthlf.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Jablonsky, 40.

<sup>9</sup> "Mid-1999 World Population," Population Reference Bureau (10 September 1999): 4, [www.prb.org/pubs/wpds99/wpds99a.htm](http://www.prb.org/pubs/wpds99/wpds99a.htm).

Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the United States began an aggressive period of down sizing its military forces. Since 1990 the United States military has reduced total forces by 40% to 1.4 million uniformed personnel.<sup>11</sup> Although our standing forces were capable of bombing the "Bully of Belgrade" into submission, many military strategic planners question our ability to fight another Desert Storm type conflict in the Middle East and retain sufficient forces to support an additional major regional conflict such as a war on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>12</sup>

The United States' democratically elected republican government stands as an example for freedom-loving peoples. We strive to promote representative forms of government throughout the global community. As stated by Secretary of State Albright:

Some call us unrealistic for insisting that democracy can take hold in less-developed nations or hegemonic for trying to promote democratic values. We understand well that democracy must emerge from individuals' desire to participate in the decisions that shape their own destinies and elect their own leaders. This is why, unlike dictatorship, democracy is never an imposition. It is, by definition, always a choice.<sup>13</sup>

Our shining example and support has helped many struggling nation-states establish and maintain representative governments. However, since the threat of the Cold War has subsided, American influence among democratic nations has diminished. Even the fledging democracies are growing less dependent on American international leadership. Regional areas have chosen to bond together and are becoming politically stronger than ever before. Also, our standing as world leader among members of the global community has been negatively effected by our refusal to pay \$1.6 million in arrears to the United Nations.<sup>14</sup>

Economically the United States has been the most powerful nation since World War II. We have survived numerous recessionary and inflationary periods. However, today the United States has a \$5.6 trillion dollar debt that equates to 55% of our Gross National Product.<sup>15</sup> Although the United States is working to reduce the overall national debt, of greater concern is the growing trend toward

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<sup>10</sup> "Population for the countries of the world: 2050 Medium variant projection," *United Nations, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs* (10 September 1999): 4, [www.popin.org/pop1998/3.htm](http://www.popin.org/pop1998/3.htm).

<sup>11</sup> Jorgen Wouters, "The Thin Red Bottom Line" *ABC News World.com*. (21 April 1999) [www.abcnews.go.com/sections/world/DailyNews/Kosovo990421\\_pentagon.html](http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/world/DailyNews/Kosovo990421_pentagon.html).

<sup>12</sup> Richard J. Newman, "Can peacekeepers make war?" *U.S. Online News* (19 January 1999): [www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/980119war.htm](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/980119war.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Madeleine K. Albright, "The testing of American foreign policy," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1998): 9.

<sup>14</sup> "US vs Total Debt to UN: 1999" *UN Financial Crisis: Campaigns, Events, & Action Proposals* (10 September 1999): [www.globalpolicy.org/finance/tables/dbttab99.htm](http://www.globalpolicy.org/finance/tables/dbttab99.htm).

<sup>15</sup> Ed Hall, *US National Debt Clock* (10 September 1999): [www.brillig.com/debt\\_clock/](http://www.brillig.com/debt_clock/).

foreign debt. Today, 38% of our national debt is held by foreign investors.<sup>16</sup> If the United States were required to payoff our international loans, the American economy and the world economies would suffer major financial disturbances. Possibly a total collapse of the free world market.

These erosions of tangible American leadership attributes are natural and not alarming--yet. It would be foolish to believe that the United States will remain the world leader forever. Nevertheless, 50 more years of leading the global community is possible.

From a realistic perspective, remaining the hegemonic leader is the best way to ensure national security and support national interests. From an idealistic point of view, 50 more years of international leadership provides more time to plant the seeds of American humanistic values in order to make the global community safer and more prosperous.

### Intangible Leadership

Unlike the first 50 years of American international leadership, in the global community of the 21st Century intangible leadership qualities will be the key to preserving our position of leadership and rallying other nations to join together and confront the myriad challenges we face in the next millenium. Healthy intangible leadership attributes will act as a counterbalance to decaying tangible leadership elements. The United States must demonstrate and promote the following critical intangible leadership attributes in order to retain followers within the global community: (1) Credibility. Independent states will follow another state because they trust the international leader.<sup>17</sup> States will trust a global leader who demonstrates sincere dedication to its stated values, sometimes this trust is acquired at the expense of the leader's own immediate national interests. (2) Consensus. States will agree to follow a global leader when it is more beneficial to their individual national interests to be part of the global community than try to stay out of the way.

Credibility, trust, and respect within the global community can only be obtained the old fashioned way: "you have to earn it". During the first 50 years of international American leadership, we developed an impressive track record of credibility as a leader who defended freedom and supported global humanity. American efforts were critical in establishing international organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund. We sacrificed American blood and treasure to support international neighbors during the Berlin Airlift, Korean War, and the Persian Gulf

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<sup>16</sup> M. W. Hodges, "Guess What Foreigners are doing with some of Money" *Grandfather Federal Debt Report* ( March 1999): [http://home.att.net/~mwhodges/debt\\_b.htm](http://home.att.net/~mwhodges/debt_b.htm).

War. We demonstrated our desire for peace by brokering the accords to end the Arab-Israeli War and the wars for independence in the former Yugoslavia. The world has carefully watched and admired our international leadership. Conversely, the global community has scrutinized American support for dictators such as Cuba's Batista, Nicaragua's Somoza, and the Shah of Iran. America's policy objectives and unsuccessful prosecution of the Vietnam War threatened our credibility by planting seeds of doubt concerning our leadership judgement. Recently we have been criticized for delays implementing peace in war-torn Southeastern Europe and for failing to intervene in the bloody Rwandan Civil War. The Global Community expects much from their international leader. As former Secretary of State George Shultz states:

The United States is not the world's policeman. But we are the world's strongest free nation, and, therefore, the preservation of our values, our principles, and our hopes for a better world rests in great measure inevitably, on our shoulders. ... Credibility is an intangible, but it is no less real. The same is true of a loss of credibility. A failure to support a friend always involves a price. Credibility, once lost has to be reearned.<sup>17</sup>

Consensus is required to support a single international leader. Individual members of the global community have many competing interests, both domestic and international. History is rife with state's loyalties changing to support their national interests. Independent nation-states will follow an international leader based on their cultural relationships, security needs, or economic designs.

Therefore, the United States must continually convince the global community that it remains in their best interests to

follow and support the current international leadership. The intangible qualities of traditional American values must be practiced and not just professed. Nations must believe that following the United States best supports their individual needs and the needs of the entire global community.

#### Conclusion

History has shown that change within the nation-state system is inevitable. The United States cannot presume to lead the global community forever. Sophisticated international dynamics prevent establishing a smooth functioning or controllable world order. Yet for the past 50 years, the United States has brought hope to the world. Following the most destructive war in history, we rebuilt our vanquished foes and made allies from enemies. Through maturing wisdom, we learned from earlier mistakes then persevered to establish the first world organization where nations can conduct intercourse

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<sup>17</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr, "Power and interdependence in the information age," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 1998): 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> George Shultz, "Power and Diplomacy in the 1980s," *United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Current Policy No. 561* (3 April 1984), 2-4.

with words not weapons. For four decades we prevented the world from being infected by cancerous Communism. Through use of diplomatic promise and physical power we have coordinated peaceful resolutions to international conflicts. By pursuing free markets the global community has prospered. Above all else, we have provided humanitarian support to neighbors in need. By practicing traditional American values on a global scale the United States has demonstrated that we provide the greatest hope for survival and progress as a community of nations.

International American leadership is not completely altruistic. Realistic undertones play strongly in our philosophy of statecraft. Remaining the international leader in the global community most assuredly supports the United States' national interests. As the sole super-power, we are more secure than any other nation. Our progressive economic leadership continues to provide prosperity at home as well as abroad. These realities of international relations are not a secret. The world is well aware that our many international risks have brought rewards to the American people. Being secure and prosperous is the goal of all members in the global community. We must be a shining example if we expect others to follow. However, we cannot become wrapped in concern for our national self-interests. We must not bend to the temptations of temporary luxury and permit the United States to retreat into neo-isolationism. As the American frontier pioneers courageously created a nation founded on humanistic values, we today must pursue an idealistic philosophy of statecraft that promotes these traditional values. The United States has an obligation to seize this historic opportunity and lead the global community into the next millennium that is filled with promise and potential for peace and prosperity.

Let every nation know...whether it wishes us well or ill...  
that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship,  
support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure survival and the success of liberty.  
This much we pledge...and more.

John F. Kennedy  
Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961

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