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Claremont McKenna College

Ending America's "Endless" Wars: Is a Left/Right Coalition on Non-Interventionist Foreign Policy Feasible?

Submitted To
Professor Jennifer Taw

By
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For
Senior Thesis
Spring 2020
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Abstract

Ever since the end of the Cold War, American exceptionalism and militarism have been ascendant, often resulting in a government that is eager and able to engage in military interventions across the world. This reality has been upheld by a strong bipartisan consensus of liberal internationalists and neoconservatives that, while it often disagreed on means, ultimately shared the same worldview. However, a number of recent global and national trends have led to growing voices on both sides of the aisle—progressives on the left, and populists on the right—to question the assumptions driving this consensus. This growing coalition has convergence on means—military withdrawal from the world—but have divergent worldviews.

This paper explored the Presidencies of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W Bush, and Barack Obama to help define the post-Cold War consensus. Then, it seeks to explore whether these new realities have offered an opportunity for true re-thinking of American foreign policy and to understand whether a coalition built upon an agreement on means, as opposed to worldview, can be successful. The paper concludes that while the political conditions indicate that the country is ripe for a re-thinking, there are still questions to be addressed before a non-interventionist foreign policy can take hold.

Section A: Introduction

I: Introduction

On December 13, 2018, the United States Senate voted 56-41 to pass Senate Joint Resolution 54, which called “to direct the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities in the Republic of Yemen that have not been authorized by Congress.”¹ The passage of this bill was historic for two reasons. First, it marked the first use of the War Powers Act of 1973, which was intended to curb the president’s power in making foreign policy decisions. The second reason that the passage of this bill was notable was because of its co-sponsors.

The bill’s lead sponsor was Senator Bernie Sanders, an independent from Vermont who is arguably the body’s most progressive member. One of the original co-sponsors, and one of two Senators to accompany Sanders to the press conference that followed the vote was Mike Lee, a Republican from Utah who has consistently been rated as one of the Senators with the most conservative voting records. The bill passed with 47 votes from Democrats and seven from Republicans, which is no small feat in today’s partisan political world.

Bipartisanship when it comes to US foreign policy is hardly a new phenomenon. Historically, it has been one of the few policy areas in which both parties have found room for agreement. For decades, the “establishment” of both parties espoused similar goals: Maintaining

¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, *A joint resolution to direct the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities in the Republic of Yemen that have not been authorized by Congress*, S.J. Res 54, 115th Cong., introduced in Senate February 28, 2018, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/54>.

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America's role on the global stage, preserving relationships with allies and partners, spreading democracy, and protecting human rights around the world. Although the means to accomplish these goals sometimes differed—Democrats tended more towards diplomacy and working with international organizations and coalitions while Republicans tended more towards military strength and unilateralism—there was seemingly more consensus on what the goal of US foreign policy should be than there was on any other issue. Even in an age of growing polarization and partisanship in the United States, agreements on the major questions of foreign policy, such as the desire for openness, an instinct towards intervention, and the view of America as the central entity in this globalized world, seem to be points of agreement between the two parties.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War left the United States as the world's sole hegemon, American foreign policy, particularly in the Executive Branch has been dominated by a combination of neoconservatives and liberal internationalists who have embraced American exceptionalism, ostensibly viewed it as their nation's responsibility to protect oppressed populations around the world, promoted a theory of globalism and openness, and used the military apparatus at their disposal to accomplish these goals. Each of four successive post-Cold War presidents, two from the Republican Party (George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush) and two Democrats (Bill Clinton and Barack Obama) mostly made foreign policy decisions constrained by these assumptions. These presidents rhetorically emphasized the United States' position as the international guarantor of freedom and pushed for a world in which liberal democratic capitalism was the norm and freedom of movement, open markets, and free trade existed everywhere.

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This vote on the Yemen bill presented a glimpse at a new possibility: A world in which Democrats and Republicans could form a bipartisan coalition that would combat the generations-long militarization of American foreign policy, halt the automatic instinct towards intervention, and reshape the way that Americans understood their role in the world. This new coalition would represent almost the mirror opposite of its predecessor: A bipartisan coalition formed by minority voices within each party—anti-war progressives on the left, and a combination of libertarians and a resurgent populist wing on the right—that agrees on means, but ultimately shares a different worldview. Generally speaking, the anti-war left would like to see American foreign policy reoriented towards diplomacy and increased, consistent concern for human rights while the libertarian and populist right believe that the United States' endless wars have cost the United States too much, both in terms of money and lives and would prefer to see America turn inward, but both seek to accomplish their respective goals by halting America's global overreach and reducing its military footprint.

The Democratic Party has long had an anti-war contingent in its party, but in the modern era, it has yet to manifest itself into a powerful entity when it comes to crafting policy. Even President Obama, who ran on an anti-interventionist platform, embraced neoliberal ideals and eventually failed to implement the vision he articulated when it came to America's role in the world. Further, in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the anti-war left has clear examples of when the attempted spread of liberal democratic ideals can go catastrophically wrong. The traditional anti-war element of the party has been joined by a number of new progressive Democrats who

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have argued, in part, that bloated military budgets have drawn funds away from important economic and social projects at home.

On the right, non-interventionist foreign policy was long seen as a fringe view, only present in libertarian wing of the party. For the most part, the Republican Party has been supportive of the United States flexing its military might. However, part of the new, rising populist tide on the American right has expressed serious concern about increased globalization. Part of this push against globalization has been an opposition to wars which right-wing nationalists see as a waste of resources. While this worldview is possibly nationalism masked in anti-interventionism and more isolationist than anti-war, it does present a sliver of an opening for an overlap between these two constituencies.

This overlap suggests that consensus created by neoconservatives and liberal internationalists may be slowly eroding. There are domestic political conditions that offer a chance at redefining the way the American government thinks about the country's place in the world. However, in order to truly re-imagine American foreign policy, a left/right coalition cannot only change rhetoric or alter the calculations of decision-makers, but must also overturn some entrenched realities that have made militarization a foundational part of American foreign policy.

These realities include the military “iron triangle” or the powerful relationship between the military, defense industry, and the US Congress, otherwise known as the military-industrial complex; the immediacy of results and apparent ease—buoyed by Congress’ consistently bloated funding of the Department of Defense—of military deployment relative to diplomacy; and the

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lack of a consistent vision since the end of the Cold War, with the exception of a commitment to protecting American interests. These entrenched realities are formed at the intersection of Congress, the Pentagon and the military, private defense contractors, and the decision-makers in the Executive Branch.

Politicians have occasionally expressed dissatisfaction with the foreign policy status quo in the past. These have typically played out during campaign season, when disagreements are often exaggerated and when an opposing party occupies the presidency. They therefore have been used more as political attacks than they have been motivated by a true desire to overturn the status quo. Even after past foreign policy failures, such as in Vietnam, the opposition to intervention was not sustainable because of the impulse towards intervention, the military industrial complex, and the lack of the clear advocacy of an alternative vision. However, some fairly significant recent events, notably the passage of the Yemen bill and the founding of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, funded primarily by liberal mega donor George Soros and the conservative billionaire Charles Koch, have made the idea of such a coalition seem plausible. The following pages will seek to explore whether these small steps could transform into something larger, what the coalition might look like, and which potential roadblocks may stand in its way.

The paper will begin with some historical background information on the militarization of American foreign policy and the instinct towards military intervention, as well the political dynamics that permitted the bipartisan consensus on foreign policy that has ruled since the conclusion of the Cold War. Following this historical perspective will come more direct analysis

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of what the future may look like. First, it will examine examples of this non-interventionist alliance and what made them possible. Then, the paper will look to answer the central question. The prevailing post-Cold War consensus broadly agrees on goals, yet it has tended to differ on means, whereas the emerging coalition agrees on means even as it disagrees on the ultimate goal. Given this, can such a coalition put together a new, coherent alternative vision of American statesmanship, under what conditions, and what might such a vision look like?

Section B: Background

II: The Indispensable Nation: American Exceptionalism, Militarism, and Intervention

The story of the interventionist nature of the United States can be told at the nexus of the idea of American exceptionalism and the rapid militarization of US foreign policy. These two phenomena built off of each other to create a state whose military was far more powerful than any other country's and a relatively stronger and more flexible tool than any other in the American foreign policy toolkit.

The bipolar structure of the Cold War era gave the United States a sense of stability, a clear enemy, and a clear goal when it came to foreign affairs. However, according to the academic Andrew Bacevich, in his book *The Age of Illusions: How American Squandered Its Cold War Victory*, "as the Soviet Union passed out of existence, Americans were left not just without that enemy but without even a framework for understanding the world and their place in it."² The fall of the Soviet Union might have conceivably presented an opening, absent the threat of communism, for the United States to retreat from the world. Instead, it led to the unhindered actualization of a powerful, long-lasting form of American exceptionalism, one that permitted the United States to pursue its destiny without any obstacle in its way.³ As the world's new leading power, the United States began to exert military and economic power even more forcefully than it had in the preceding half-century. As former National Security Advisor Brent

² Andrew Bacevich, *The Age of Illusions: How American Squandered Its Cold War Victory*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2020), 2.

³ Andrew Bacevich, "The Age of Illusions," Speech, Politics and Prose, Washington, D.C., January 27, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUd4jOszwd8>.

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Scowcroft later put it, the United States at the start of the 1990s found itself “standing alone at the height of power” with “the rarest opportunity to shape the world and the deepest responsibility to do so wisely for the benefit of not just the United States, but of all nations.”⁴

Prominent journalists and academics at the time joined in agreeing that the United States’ victory in the ideological battle with the Soviet Union meant that liberal democratic ideals were ascendant and that the rest of the world would soon follow America’s lead. Writing for *Foreign Affairs* in 1990, columnist Charles Krauthammer declared “The immediate post-Cold War world is not multipolar. It is unipolar. The center of world power is the unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies,” arguing that this preeminence was based on the fact that the United States was uniquely situated militarily, politically, and economically to be a major player in any international conflict at any time, and stating that the only factor that might interrupt a period of “three or four decades” of US superiority would be not overreach abroad, but an economic decline caused by wasteful spending at home.⁵ The political scientist Francis Fukuyama would famously write in 1989 that the world had reached “The End of History” and that democratic capitalism’s triumph over authoritarian communism meant that there would be “no struggle or conflict over ‘large’ issues, and consequently no need for generals or statesmen; what remains is primarily economic activity.”⁶

Though the post-Cold War American presidents agreed that liberal democratic ideals were ascendant, if not inevitable, in their eyes, the process to liberation would not be a passive

⁴ George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 564.

⁵ Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* (1990), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1991-02-01/unipolar-moment>.

⁶ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?,” *The National Interest*, (1989): 5, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

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one. If this unstoppable progress toward worldwide liberation did not go smoothly, the United States would be willing to deploy its dominant military to push back against challenges to liberal democracy. As Stephen Walt explains it in his book *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy*, “Having won the Cold War, (...) US leaders now set out to create a liberal world order through the active use of US power. Instead of defending its own shores, maximizing prosperity and well-being at home, and promoting its ideals by force of example, Washington sought to remake other countries in its own image and incorporate them into institutions and arrangements of its own design.”⁷

In the decade that followed the Cold War, the United States intervened in conflicts in which there were not even nominal challenges to American security. Instead, the justifications for the interventions in the Gulf, Somalia, and the Balkans relied on the United States’ responsibility to uphold human rights, to protect citizens from the violence of oppressive regimes and to demonstrate American commitment to post-Cold War alliances. The outcomes of these initial post-Cold War interventions ranged from apparently quick victory in the first Gulf War, to a protracted, bloody but ultimately successful involvement in the Balkans to a catastrophic failure in Somalia. These military missions proved that American hegemony on the world stage would go virtually unchallenged.

While under Bush 41 and Clinton globalism was the general guideline for international politics, when Bush 43 took office, American militarism took on a life of its own. While military operations under his two predecessors had typically been more contained, under Bush war was,

⁷ Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions, America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 23.

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according to Bacevich, “a sort of complement to globalization—another approach to bringing the world into conformity with American preferences.”⁸ Prior to Bush, the experiences in Somalia and elsewhere had made direct military conflict an undesirable course. Instead, the United States relied primarily on long-range weapons to fight adversaries from a distance, and on training local militaries to do the fighting on the ground behalf of the United States.⁹ Following 9/11, however, the United States engaged in conflicts that lasted well beyond their original scope: In Iraq as in Afghanistan, the United States didn’t withdraw once it captured and assassinated Saddam Hussein or drove the Taliban from power, but the military instead stayed in order to rebuild Iraqi and Afghan societies in the U.S.’s own image; from then on the concept of “endless wars” entered the American lexicon.

Accompanying this trend toward intervention was the rapid militarization of the American foreign policy apparatus. The American government has increasingly turned to the Pentagon to provide services beyond what it would typically do. An example is the 2013 initiative by the Chief of Staff of the Army Raymond Odierno, known as Regional Allied Forces (RAF), which, according to former Department of Defense official Rosa Brooks is an “effort to take a large, clumsy, industrial behemoth and turn it into an agile, regionally engaged, globally responsive and culturally sophisticated force—one that’s more Mao than Bismarck and more T.E. Lawrence than George Patton.”¹⁰ This initiative attempts to diversify the ability of the military to be not only a combatant force, but a cultural, diplomatic, and legal one, as well. It

⁸ Bacevich, *The Age of Illusions*, 108.

⁹ For more on the United States’ desire to fight war at a distance between the end of the Cold War and the second Iraq War, see Bacevich, *American Empire, Chapter 6: Gunboats and Gurkhas*.

¹⁰ Rosa Brooks: *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 145.

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would, as a result, expand America's reach and strengthen its grip on the rest of the world in these areas.

In a more tangible sense, turning to the Department of Defense has increasingly become the only financially viable option for dealing with foreign affairs. As of 2019, DOD's budget is \$1.1 trillion; compared to \$40.7 billion for the State Department. This discrepancy in funding leads to a vicious cycle. As Brooks explains, "As budget cuts cripple civilian agencies and programs, they lose their ability to perform as they once did, so we look to the military to pick up the slack, further expanding its role in both foreign and domestic activities and further straining the volunteer force. This requires still higher military budgets, which continues the devastating cycle."¹¹ Campaign funding and other political interests mean that Congress consistently provides the Defense Department with large budgets. Foreign policy decision-makers in the executive branch interpret this relatively large budget as indicative of the military's capabilities, and therefore often engage the military in operations that it is not intended to, nor indeed capable of, performing. The military budget, along with many interventionist policies, have consistently had bipartisan support in Congress and among presidents from both parties.¹²

Furthermore, the Department of Defense (and the federal government more generally) is littered with former executives from powerful defense industries, and vice versa (the so-called "revolving door"). A report from The Project on Government Oversight found that "There were 645 instances of the top 20 defense contractors in fiscal year 2016 hiring former senior government officials, military officers, Members of Congress, and senior legislative staff as

¹¹ Ibid., 21.

¹² The bipartisan nature of these pursuits is explored in more detail in Chapter III.

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lobbyists, board members, or senior executives in 2018.”¹³ According to the report, having a number of important decision makers rotating between DOD, the military, and top military contractors “often confuses what is in the best financial interests of defense contractors—excessively large Pentagon budgets, endless wars, and overpriced weapon systems—with what is in the best interest of military effectiveness and protecting citizens.”¹⁴ Once again, this dynamic means that the military can find itself overstretched by decisions made in the executive branch and by important lobbying groups. As the United States’ perception of its worldwide standing has changed, it has engaged in missions that none of its civilian or military agencies are equipped to undertake, including nation-building and regime change operations, and the executive has impulsively deployed its most well-funded asset to handle these duties.

Technological advancements have also intensified the militarization of foreign policy by making war easier to wage and reducing the costs of using lethal force for the United States. The concept of trying to kill combatants from a safe distance has been around as long as war itself. Drones are simply the latest iteration of such a weapon and are more effective, more efficient, and cheaper than their predecessors. Although the first strike in America’s “drone war” took place in 2002, drones became an especially prominent weapon under Presidents Obama, who expanded the kill lists of potential drone targets and began to use them in countries that were not necessarily covered by the AUMF, such as Yemen and Somalia.¹⁵

¹³ Mandy Smithberger, “Brass Parachutes: The Problem of the Pentagon Revolving Door,” *Project On Government Oversight*, November 5, 2018, <https://www.pogo.org/report/2018/11/brass-parachutes/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For more on drone warfare in the Obama administration, see Brooks, *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything*, Chapter 5: *The Secret War*.

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These factors—the strong belief in American exceptionalism, bipartisan agreement in Congress, an Executive Branch eager for a war, the bloating of the defense budget and the overall militarization of US foreign policy—arguably combined most devastatingly in the Bush administration, following the attacks on 9/11, with the introduction of the broad War on Terror. The War on Terror came to be after bipartisan Congressional agreement to go to war; was initiated by a president who was advised by core members of Project for the New American Century (who had been pushing for the overthrowing of the Iraqi government since 1989 and who believed that American exceptionalism was powerful to the point that it could cause a domino effect of US ideology), and others who had previously worked for powerful defense contractors (notably Vice President Dick Cheney); and would lead to the United States into two wars that stretched the American military far beyond its capabilities and which have lasted almost two decades.

The War on Terror, also led to the creation of the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force, which permitted the American president to use the military to combat the “nations, organizations, or persons [the president] determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons,” a bill which has had a lasting and devastating impact.¹⁶ Each of the three presidents in the post-9/11 era have used the wide-ranging authorization of the AUMF as justification for military operations. A February 2018 report from the Congressional Research Service states that the AUMF “had been cited 37 times in connection with actions in 14 countries and on the high

¹⁶ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Authorization for Use of Military Force*, S.J. Res. 23, 107th Cong., Introduced in Senate September 14, 2001, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/23>.

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seas:” 18 times by Bush, 21 by Obama, and, as of the date of publication, twice by Trump.¹⁷ The AUMF is only one of many examples of both parties finding common ground when it came to determining American action on the world stage.

III: The Washington Playbook: Bipartisanship in Foreign Policy Initiatives Since 1989

In many major foreign policy initiatives of the past 30 years the bipartisan nature of the post-Cold War alliance is apparent both in Congress and within the administrations of the four post-Cold War presidents. At least in the initial stages of military operations, Congress has typically supported the president’s position, or at least deferred to the executive to make important decisions. However, in many of these cases the president launched operations without Congressional approval, only turning to the legislature for approval once the military campaigns had begun.

The president’s position as the Commander-in-Chief, the fact that they can make crucial decisions more quickly than the legislature, the belief that “politics stops at the water’s edge,” and Congress’ fear of contradicting the Executive in times of war have given the President outsized power in determining issues of foreign policy. As a result, much of the convergence of beliefs have been most easily observed through the various presidents, their cabinets and other advisors. While Congress has occasionally gone against the president’s wishes and voiced concerns over the office’s growing power, bipartisanship has nonetheless been apparent in the

¹⁷ U.S. Library of Congress, CRS, *Presidential References to the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force in Publicly Available Executive Actions and Reports to Congress*, by Matthew Weed, CRS Report 7-4589, (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, February 16, 2018).

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House and Senate. This can be true either by legislative support or by falling in line behind the president and increasingly deferring to the executive's desires.

The convergence of views between the four presidents is noticeable in both actions and rhetoric. Despite occasionally emphasizing differences with the opposing party, the four post-Cold War Presidents often spoke in similar ways about the role of the country, and often staffed their administrations with the same people as their predecessors. Each of these politicians made sure to criticize their predecessor on the issues, but as Andrew Bacevich explains in *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy*, written in 2002, both Bushes and Clinton had almost identical approaches to dealing with China, North Korea, Iraq, and Colombia. Bacevich elaborates that Clinton and George W. Bush “conceived of America’s proper role in a post-Cold War world in nearly identical terms. (...) They shared an identical belief in the importance of US military supremacy. (...) They voiced similar expectations for the future (...) To a remarkable extent, they agreed on the basic aims that should inform US policy and the principles that should guide its conduct. (...) To be sure, not every adherent to that consensus agreed on every detail; but on those things that mattered most, agreement was well-nigh unanimous.”¹⁸ George H.W. Bush, and, to a lesser extent, Obama, shared these same beliefs.

One of the ways that these agreements manifested themselves is in the propensity for intervention. According to the US Commission on National Security, between the Cold War and 1999 the United States engaged in almost 50 military interventions, compared to 16 during the

¹⁸ Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 214-215.

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Cold War.¹⁹ To varying degrees, each of these presidents were responsible for engaging the military in arenas around the world, including in Panama and Somalia (H.W. Bush), the Balkans and Haiti (Clinton), Iraq and Afghanistan (W. Bush), and Libya (Obama). A second manifestation of this consensus was the way in which these presidents and their administrations spoke about the importance of globalization and openness, America's centrality in this open world, and the military's role in maintaining this central position. George H.W. Bush would make openness—in his words “open borders, open trade and, most importantly, open minds”—the essence of American foreign policy during his term as president.²⁰ As Bacevich notes, however, “always, when it came to openness, expanding US access to markets abroad was the first order of business.”²¹ The President would consistently make the point that open markets and free trade were central to “prosperity for every American job holder.”²² On issues of national security, a Bush talking point during the 1988 campaign was that he would never “apologize for America,” regardless of what the facts were.²³ In the foreign policy memoir written with Scowcroft, Bush would acknowledge that while the first Gulf War was important because it demonstrated that the United States was willing to reach out to the rest of the world it was “even more important to keep the strings of control tightly in our hands.”²⁴

¹⁹ U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century, *New World Coming: The United States Commission on National Security/21st Century*, Washington, DC, (1999), 128.

²⁰ George H.W. Bush, “Address before the 45th Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” Speech, New York City, October 1, 1990, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-the-45th-session-the-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-new-york>.

²¹ Bacevich, *American Empire*, 73.

²² Quoted in *Ibid.*, 74.

²³ George H.W. Bush, “Ethnic Coalition Speech.” Speech, August 2, 1988. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4555921/user-clip-bush-ethnic-coalition-speech>.

²⁴ Scowcroft and Bush, *A World Transformed*, 491.

Clinton, who defeated Bush in the 1992 election, and members of his administration echoed almost identical talking points. His first Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, noted “the driving force behind economic growth is openness—open markets, open investment, open communications, and open trade.”²⁵ Again however, Clintonites emphasized that America’s place in this open world was the most important. Albright declared “America’s place is at the center of this system”, while the President proclaimed that his country had to be “at the center of every vital global network” in order to “dramatically increase our leverage to work with people for peace, for human rights and for stability.”²⁶ On National Security, the Clinton administration, like its predecessor, considered the United States to be the “indispensable nation.”²⁷ At the start of the 21st century, National Security Advisor Samuel Berger would pronounce that “today, just about everybody believes that we need a strong military to protect our interests in a world of continuing if shifting dangers.”²⁸

George W. Bush’s rhetoric sounds notably similar to both his father’s and to Clinton’s. Bush, like Clinton, arrived in the Oval Office having defeated the closest thing to an incumbent, sitting Vice President Al Gore, in the 2000 election, by noting differences between himself and the prior administration. Yet, on the imperatives of freedom and openness, Bush offered only a slightly updated version of his predecessors’ talking points, stating that “the expectation of freedom is fed by free markets and expanded by free trade, and carried across borders by the

²⁵ Quoted in Bacevich, *American Empire*, 101.

²⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁷ Madeleine K. Albright, Interview on NBC-TV, “*The Today Show*” with Matt Lauer, Columbus, Ohio, February 19, 1998, <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/1998/980219a.html>.

²⁸ Samuel Berger, “American Leadership in the 21st Century,” Speech, National Press Club, Washington D.C., January 6, 2000, https://1997-2001.state.gov/policy_remarks/2000/000106_berger.html.

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Internet.”²⁹ Talking about the importance and supremacy of the American military, Bush 43 and his advisors were even more aggressive than Bush 41 and Clinton. Bush would say that the new world that was “shaped by American courage, power and wisdom now echoes with American ideals;”³⁰ his eventual Secretary of State Colin Powell would declare that the country “stands ready to help any country wishing to join the democratic world; any country that puts the law in place and begins to live by that rule, any country that seeks peace and prosperity and a place in the sun.”³¹ Following 9/11 it was clear that to accomplish these goals, the United States would use the full capacity of its military, whose capabilities remained, in the words of the president, “second to none.”³² In a divergence from both his father and his direct predecessor, the Bush doctrine would embrace the concepts of unilateralism and preemptive strikes as crucial elements of his approach to foreign policy.

After Bush left office with dwindling popularity—a decline partially attributable to the failing war in Iraq—Barack Obama ran his campaign more explicitly opposed to protracted wars and militarism than any of the three presidents before him. Yet his rhetoric on America’s relationship with the rest of the world remained largely the same. During his remarks after being awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize, Obama would declare that the U.S. had “helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms. The service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform has promoted peace and

²⁹ Quoted in Bacevich, *American Empire*, 217.

³⁰ George W. Bush, “A Period of Consequences,” Speech, Charleston, S.C., September 23, 1999, http://www3.citadel.edu/pao/addresses/pres_bush.html.

³¹ Colin Powell, “Remarks at Confirmation Hearing,” Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington D.C., January 17, 2001, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2001/443.htm>.

³² Quoted in Bacevich, *American Empire*, 221.

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prosperity from Germany to Korea, and enabled democracy to take hold in places like the Balkans,”³³ and in 2012 he would repeat Clinton and Albright’s formulation of the United States as the “indispensable nation” in world affairs and maintain that as long as he was President, that reality would not change.³⁴ Obama did challenge some of the conventional wisdom on intervention and militarism, but his Presidency did little to alter the central components of post-Cold American foreign policy: Liberal democratic ideals were ascendant, and American economic and military supremacy were central to this ascendancy.

The other way in which these four Presidencies mirrored each other is in the ways in which they staffed their respective administrations. Colin Powell served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, and later became Secretary of State in George W. Bush’s administration. Dick Cheney, the younger President Bush’s Vice President, had been the Secretary of Defense during his father’s Presidency. Brent Scowcroft, the elder Bush’s National Security Advisor, also served as Chairman of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board under George W. Bush. Robert Gates, the Director of Central Intelligence and Scowcroft’s Deputy, was named Secretary of Defense in 2006 and continued in this role through part of Obama’s first term. In short, many of the most important architects of George H.W. Bush’s foreign policy vision reprised their roles, albeit in different positions, when his son took office eight years later. The same holds true on the Democratic side, as Barack Obama was advised by many members of the Clinton administration, many of whom have

³³ Barack H. Obama, “Nobel Lecture: A Just and Lasting Peace,” Speech, Oslo City Hall, Oslo, Norway, December 10, 2009,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/obama-legacy/nobel-peace-prize-oslo-2009-speech.html>.

³⁴ Barack H. Obama, “State of the Union Address,” Speech, Washington, DC, January 25, 2011,

<https://www.npr.org/2011/01/26/133224933/transcript-obamas-state-of-union-address>.

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reprised their roles for more recent nominees Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden, who served as Secretary of State and Vice President under Obama, respectively. The power of established leaders in each of the two major parties ensures the perpetuation of the same ways of thinking on many important issues, including statesmanship and foreign policy.

The creation of this foreign policy elite—which controls much of the decision-making in the country—is apparent not only within and between presidential administrations, but also in think tanks, which often housed important officials when the opposing party took office, and served as “policy shops” for administrations when they same party controlled the presidency. As Walt lays out in great detail in *The Hell of Good Intentions*, the foreign policy community, consisting of government officials, think tank employees, academics, and members of the media, occupy a commanding presence in foreign policy making, and can plausibly fulfill a career by bouncing between these fields.³⁵ This elite, derisively termed “The Blob” by Obama advisor Ben Rhodes, like the presidents outlined above, often engage in groupthink when it comes to the understanding of America’s role in the world and tend to promote an activist American foreign policy. Although such think tanks exist both on the left (Center for American Progress, Center for a New American Security) and right (American Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation, and the now-defunct PNAC), they often converge on ideas of American action and intervention, and were mostly supporters of the Iraq War in 2003, and the phenomenon of the cycle between these think tanks and various governmental positions existed on both sides of the aisle.³⁶

³⁵ As an example, Richard Haas worked in the NSC, DOD, and the State Department during H.W. Bush’s administration, worked at Hamilton College at Brookings during the Clinton years, returned to State under Powell from 2001 from 2003, and has led the Council on Foreign Relations ever since.

³⁶ For more on this dynamic, see Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions*, Chapter 3, “Defining the ‘Blob’: What is the ‘Foreign Policy Community’?”

While the center of American foreign policy has remained the Presidency and the Executive Branch, influenced by outside groups, Congress' role is also important. Although presidents have launched military operations without consulting Congress, many of these decisions are often eventually brought to the legislature for approval. While this dynamic leaves Congress in a difficult situation, many of the votes on these post-Cold War interventions show a Congress either willing to support the president's decision—at least initially and often in a bipartisan manner—or at a minimum neglecting to oppose the choices made by the executive. These trends, somewhat blunted in the years directly following the Cold War, have become exacerbated after 9/11 and perhaps even more so during the Obama Presidency. The following paragraphs will explore Congress' role in a series of important foreign policy decisions since 1989.

House Joint Resolution 658 in 1990 declared that Congress “supports the deployment of U.S. armed forces to the Persian Gulf region and expresses appreciation to such forces,” and passed the House by a 380-29 vote.³⁷ A similar resolution was passed in the Senate by a vote of 96-3.³⁸ Although initial attempts to authorize force in the following Congress failed, both the House and Senate of the 102nd Congress eventually agreed to allow the president to continue to deploy armed forces in Iraq.

The intervention in the Somali Civil War presented a slightly more complicated situation. The original Senate Joint Resolution “authorizing the use of United States Armed Forces in

³⁷ U.S. Congress, House, *United States Policy on Iraqi Aggression Resolution*, H.J. Res 658, 101st Cong., Introduced in House September 27, 1990, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-joint-resolution/658>.

³⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, *A concurrent resolution supporting the actions taken by the President with respect to Iraqi aggression against Kuwait*. S. Con. Res. 147, 101st Cong., Introduced in Senate September 28, 1990, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-concurrent-resolution/147>.

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Somalia pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution” passed the Senate and the House, the former by voice vote and the latter with a large majority of Democratic support and only three Republicans voting in favor.³⁹ However, a Republican amendment that sought to limit the timeframe of the operation was voted down, with 48 Republicans siding with a large majority of Democrats.⁴⁰ Following the Battle of Mogadishu, in October 1993, during which an American Black Hawk Helicopter was shot down, resulting in 19 Americans dead and 73 wounded, Congress passed, by voice vote, a bill demanding that troops be withdrawn by the end of the following March.⁴¹ This series of events demonstrated that, at the very least, Congress was willing to use its war powers when American lives were lost during an operation in which American security was not at stake and humanitarian aid seemed to be the only reason for intervention.

After approving of the first Gulf War and demanding Clinton withdraw from Somalia, “Congress started backsliding in the early 1990s,” in terms of their oversight role, according to Stephen Weismann “when the Clinton administration sent forces to Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo without congressional authorization.”⁴² In the early stages of the NATO-led interventions in the former Yugoslavia, the House and Senate voted to express support for the US taking part in these missions, doing so through Senate Resolution 330 (Bosnia) and House Concurrent Resolution 42

³⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Resolution Authorizing the Use of United States Armed Forces in Somalia*, S.J. Res. 45, 103rd Cong., Introduced in Senate February 4, 1993, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/senate-joint-resolution/45>.

⁴⁰ H.Amdt.67 to Ibid. <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/1993/roll180.xml>.

⁴¹ U.S. Congress, House, *Directing the President pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution to remove United States Armed Forces from Somalia by January 31, 1994.*, H. Con. Res. 170, 103rd Cong., Introduced in House October 22, 1993, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/170>.

⁴² Stephen Weissman, “Congress and War: How the House and the Senate Can Reclaim Their Role,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-12-12/congress-and-war>.

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(Kosovo).⁴³ Despite these votes of support, the Congressional Research Services states that “The United States participated in both United Nations and NATO actions without explicit congressional authorization.”⁴⁴ In 1994, the Senate voted on bill 2042, which stated “that no ground combat troops should be deployed to Bosnia unless previously authorized by Congress;” this was largely ignored by the President as NATO took over ground operations in Bosnia in December 1995.⁴⁵ Following this development, according to political scientist Ryan C. Hendrickson “the House voted to show support for the U.S. troops, but also expressed its opposition to Clinton's policy. In effect, the House admitted defeat and demonstrated that it was unwilling to test Clinton on constitutional war powers issues.”⁴⁶ In voting for Resolution 99, by a vote of 69-30, the Senate eventually reached the same conclusion.⁴⁷ This series of votes demonstrates that even when wars may be unpopular in Congress, and even when that Congress’ majority desires to obstruct the president’s agenda and curb his power, as was the case in the 1994 GOP-led House, it has shied away from using its most potent tool—the power of the purse—to effectively stand in the way.

The Iraq War, launched by Republican Bush 43 in 2003, passed the Senate by an overwhelming margin of 77-23, with majorities of both parties voting in support. The support in the House was weaker, but nearly 40% of Democrats still voted to authorize a president of the opposing party to launch a war. Notably, three of the four most powerful members of

⁴³ U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, U.S. Armed Forces Abroad: Selected Congressional Votes Since 1982, by Barbara Salazar Torreon and Carla Y. Davis-Castro, RL31693, (2020), 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ryan C. Hendrickson, “War Powers, Bosnia, and the 104th Congress,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 113, No. 2, (1998), 253,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2657855.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A851e5575514f07814c102cbf454cd050>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

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Democratic leadership (with the exception of House Minority Whip Nancy Pelosi) voted in favor of the resolution.⁴⁸ The aforementioned AUMF of 2001 passed even more decisively, with no Senators and only one member of the House voting nay.⁴⁹ These decisions were heavily influenced by the Bush administration's presentation of misleading information about the situation in Iraq, as the White House assured Congress that Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, as well as the administration's promises to get US troops out of the country within a matter of months. Still, Congress voted in favor of these proposals within a week of President Bush announcing the decision to go to war.⁵⁰

During the Obama years, Congress seemed even less eager to use their powers when it came to foreign affairs. Congress did not vote on Obama's military surge in Afghanistan. In Libya, the Senate refused to hold votes on authorization (which would have been held after the UN-led coalition had already begun its mission), and the GOP-led House "arranged votes on three very different resolutions: one that would authorize the use of force in Libya, one that would defund U.S. drones' participation in the operation (...) and one that would mandate an immediate U.S. withdrawal. None passed."⁵¹ In Syria, as well, Congress held very few public hearings or votes about American action, or lack thereof. One bill that did pass, which offered military support to a group of Syrian rebels, gave, according to one of its supporters, Senator Barbara Boxer "the administration the wind at their back if they want to move forward,"

⁴⁸ U.S. Congress, House, *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002*, H.J. Res. 114, 107th Cong., Introduced in House October 2, 2002, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-joint-resolution/114>.

⁴⁹ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Authorization for Use of Military Force*, S.J. Res. 23, 107th Cong., Introduced in Senate September 14, 2001, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/23>.

⁵⁰ Weissman, *Congress and War*.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

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acknowledging that the executive would make the final decision.⁵² The Senate also did not vote when the President sought their support to take retaliatory strikes against the Assad government for using chemical weapons against his citizens, when a Russian-led diplomatic effort halted the need for a Congressional vote. Through these examples, it appears as if Congress has typically either supported the president's decision for intervention or offered passive resistance, which has almost never resulted in concrete changes.

The broader neoliberal consensus on foreign policy was evident not only in votes on military intervention, but on other issues as well, notably those of free trade and strengthening NATO. When Democratic President Clinton signed NAFTA into law in 1993, he did so with 75% of support from Republicans in the House, and 40% from his own party. The numbers in the Senate were almost identical, with half of Democrats and three-quarters of Republicans voting in favor.⁵³ In terms of building their European alliance, George H.W Bush ushered a re-unified Germany into NATO, while Clinton, Bush 43 and Obama each extended NATO further East, with the additions of, among other nations, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Croatia, and Montenegro. Each of these nations had previously been a part of Eastern powers Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union.

To be sure, Democratic and Republican administrations diverged in some less noticeable, albeit meaningful, ways. This dynamic is most clearly seen in the debate of unilateralism against multilateralism and the desire for diplomatic solutions as opposed to military ones. In 2007

⁵² Quoted in Ibid.

⁵³ U.S. Congress, House, *North American Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act*, H.R 3450, 103rd Cong., Introduced in House November 4, 1993, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-bill/3450/actions?KWICView=false>.

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Strobe Talbott, then the President of the Brookings Institution wrote about George W. Bush, “Profoundly skeptical about the utility of international treaties, international institutions and international law, the current president annulled, un-signed or otherwise withdrew from a range of international agreements and mechanisms—the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, the International Criminal Court, the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty.”⁵⁴ Likewise, his invasion of Iraq was led by the United States alone, not by an international organization, and was joined by the so-called “coalition of the willing,” one in which Great Britain was the only other major country involved.

On the flipside, Republicans in Congress have often been critical of Democratic presidents who pursue multilateralism. The Republican’s ten-point Contract with America, which partially led to an overwhelming victory in the 1994 midterms read “No U.S. troops under UN command and restoration of the essential parts of our national security funding to strengthen our own national defense and maintain credibility around the world.”⁵⁵ The next Democratic President, Obama, whose major foreign policy initiatives were typically pursued in a bipartisan fashion, was mercilessly attacked by Republicans who blasted his foreign policy as “leading from behind” (a quote often attributed by opponents to the President himself but which was actually uttered by an anonymous White House official).⁵⁶

In their relationships with the so-called “rogue states” such as North Korea and Iran, especially in the aftermath of Iraq, Democrats often accused Republicans of being too bellicose

⁵⁴ Strobe Talbott, “Unilateralism: Anatomy of a Foreign Policy Disaster,” *The Brookings Institution*, February 21, 2007, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/unilateralism-anatomy-of-a-foreign-policy-disaster/>.

⁵⁵ “Contract with America,” 1994, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/contract-with-america/>.

⁵⁶ Josh Rogin, “Who really said Obama was ‘leading from behind’?,” *Foreign Policy*, October 27, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/27/who-really-said-obama-was-leading-from-behind/>.

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and therefore risking getting entangled into another war. Republicans, for their part, were nearly universally opposed to President Obama's pursuit of diplomatic agreements with Iran and Cuba, an approach that went against the Bush-era credo: "We don't negotiate with evil; we defeat it."⁵⁷ Despite these frequent characterizations of the "reckless right" and the "feckless left", they were often used as a way to give the illusion of partisan discord, while the two sides primarily remained in lockstep on the big issues of openness, militarism, and intervention. Even as data shows that since the 1990s American politics has grown increasingly partisan and polarized, agreement on these core questions has remained intact.

However, a number of recent global trends have poked holes in this consensus. Concurrently, the factors that permitted for the agreement between the center-right and center-left, have begun to deteriorate. As a result, both parties have a growing anti-war movement, and these elements are no longer limited to the fringes of each party. Further, the seemingly unending presence of American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and America's large military footprint elsewhere in the world, even nearly three decades after the end of the Cold War and two decades after 9/11, with little progress to show for it has led to a growing proportion of Americans being wary of the potential benefits of entering conflicts abroad. A 2019 poll from Pew Research Center indicates that "59 percent of Americans said the war in Afghanistan was 'not worth fighting,' while "only 27 percent of Americans 'say that military interventions in other countries [to solve conflicts] make the United States safer.'"⁵⁸ Despite at

⁵⁷ Leslie H. Gelb, "In the End, Every President Talks to the Bad Guys," *The Washington Post*, April 27, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/24/AR2008042401459.html>.

⁵⁸ Ruth Igielnik and Kim Parker, "Majorities of U.S. veterans, public say the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were not worth fighting," *Pew Research Center*, July 10, 2019,

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times governing to the contrary, each of the last two presidents, from opposing parties and almost diametrically opposed in all other ways, have made an aversion to getting embroiled in unwinnable wars one of the central themes of their campaigns. The following sections will examine the growing possibility and reality of a progressive/populist coalition centered on a non-interventionist foreign policy.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/10/majorities-of-u-s-veterans-public-say-the-wars-in-iraq-and-afghanistan-were-not-worth-fighting/>.

Section C: Analysis

IV: Populists and Progressives: The Growing Possibility of a New Bipartisan Coalition

Anti-war voices, on both sides of the political spectrum, are not a new phenomenon. Following the Vietnam War, politicians on both sides of the political aisle became wary of getting embroiled in foreign conflicts, and the progressive left tried (and failed) to nominate the explicitly anti-war Eugene McCarthy in 1968. However, as the neoconservative/liberal internationalist consensus described in the first section crystalized, the acceptance of liberal democratic hegemony and militarism also solidified. As Bacevich explains, by the 1990s “In the political mainstream, the vision of a world allowing capitalism free reign with the US military functioning as a sort of global hall monitor found favor with Democrats and Republicans alike. Disagreement meant marginalization. Ambitious youngsters keen to make their mark in Washington knew better than to suggest that the time might be ripe for curbing the nation’s appetite for remaking the world in its own image.”⁵⁹ The opposition to this new globalized, militarized foreign policy was relegated to, “a crabbed minority on the far right and left.”⁶⁰

Among this crabbed minority was the nativist Republican Patrick Buchanan, who unsuccessfully ran for president in three successive elections between 1992 and 2000. Buchanan was adamantly opposed to globalism, did not believe that the end of the Cold War had “brought with it an end to history” and argued that the United States needed to question “all the institutions of the Cold War, from vast permanent U.S. armies on foreign soil, to old alliances

⁵⁹ Bacevich, *Age of Illusions*, 76.

⁶⁰ Bacevich, *American Empire*, 1.

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against Communist enemies that no longer exist.”⁶¹ Another candidate in the 1992 Presidential campaign, businessman Ross Perot, would argue that globalism was costing American jobs and that militarism was costly to American workers, too. According to Perot it was unjust “to take the sons and daughters of working people” in order to combat “a problem somewhere around the world.”⁶² These nationalist, “America first” foreign policy instincts have become even more powerful in the aftermath of long-term military activity around the world, and now have a nominal champion residing in the White House. This trend has not been limited to the United States. In the past few years, there has been a rising movement around the world on both the right, represented by, among others Trump, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, and the left, as embodied by Senator Sanders and former British Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn, that has questioned the success of globalism over the past 30 years.

The left has, historically, had a larger and more influential anti-war wing. The aforementioned McCarthy in 1968 (in the aftermath of Vietnam), and subsequently Howard Dean in 2004 and Barack Obama in 2008 (during the war in Iraq) centered non-intervention as part of their respective campaign platforms. However, the most stringent anti-interventionists typically failed to make inroads on the national stage. Obama’s Presidency, despite providing some meaningful challenges, proved that the neoconservative/liberal internationalist consensus was still powerful in Washington, DC. While Obama managed to not send many additional American troops into battle, avoided military catastrophes on the level of Vietnam and Iraq, and accomplished historical diplomatic feats with Iran and Cuba, he also didn’t end the wars in Iraq

⁶¹ Patrick Buchanan, “A Crossroads in Our Country’s History,” Speech, Concord, New Hampshire, December 10, 2001, <http://www.4president.org/speeches/1992/patbuchanan1992announcement.htm>.

⁶² Quoted in Bacevich, *Age of Illusions*, 55.

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and Afghanistan, increased the levels of drone warfare, entered an ill-advised coalition to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, administered a troop surge in Afghanistan, and generally failed to redefine the parameters of American leadership or curb the militarism of American foreign policy.⁶³

As evidenced in the above section, while Congress could play a role in constraining any future president's actions abroad, the Executive Branch will likely continue to be the hub of American foreign policy decision-making. The 2016 and 2020 presidential elections suggested that an executive branch transformation away from a militarized foreign policy may be possible. In the first, Bernie Sanders ran on an anti-trade, anti-war message and surprisingly challenged Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primary. Then, Donald Trump, promising to put "America first" in his foreign policy defeated her in the general election. Prior to the election, both Sanders and Trump were considered outsiders within their own parties, but partly due to their anti-globalization rhetoric, both overperformed relative to expectations for their success. While Sanders ultimately came up short in both 2016 and 2020, he ran two fairly strong campaigns, indisputably moving the conversation in the Democratic Party to the left. While much of Sanders' platform was centered on his social democratic domestic vision, he often drew points of contrast with his more centrist opponents over their support for the Iraq War and NAFTA. In 2020, some commentators contended that, as much of the party moved towards Sanders on domestic policy, his progressive outlook on foreign affairs would distinguish him more clearly from the rest of the field.⁶⁴

⁶³ Bacevich, *The Age of Illusions*, 130.

⁶⁴ Peter Beinart, "It's Foreign Policy that Distinguishes Bernie This Time," *The Atlantic*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/foreign-policy-distinguishes-bernie-sanders-2020/583279/>.

The left's evaluation of the issues plaguing American foreign policy touches on many of the elements of the liberal internationalist/neoconservative consensus—ranging from the costs of intervention, to trade deals, to the theory of globalization to the militarism of the foreign policy apparatus. Matt Duss, Sanders' foreign policy advisor, stated on February 19 that, while an America under his boss would reverse the interventionist nature of American foreign policy, such a progressive administration would also “be clear about the values and the outcomes the US favors — self-determination and human rights, respect for people's dignity and their security.”⁶⁵ This progressive foreign policy understands America's failures partly because of the harm they caused in countries that the United States was purportedly helping. Many of the critiques from the left on America's longest-lasting wars—whether Vietnam, Iraq or Afghanistan—have been framed in terms of the civilian lives lost and the impact on the invaded countries.

Sanders was not the only candidate in the huge Democratic primary field to voice concerns over the current status of American foreign policy. Elizabeth Warren—whose anti-corruption crusade was central to her Presidential campaign—spoke often in debates about the “revolving door” and the military industrial complex. Her lead foreign policy advisor, Sasha Baker, told *The Nation* “today we have a Pentagon that is so large and so overdeveloped, relative to our other instruments of foreign policy, that the way we engage with the world is through the military, and that's completely backwards.”⁶⁶ Pete Buttigieg, a military veteran, not considered to

⁶⁵ John Haltiwanger, “Bernie Sanders' foreign policy adviser breaks down the senator's progressive global agenda for 2020,” *Business Insider*, February 25, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/matt-duss-bernie-sanders-foreign-policy-adviser-2019-2>.

⁶⁶ David Klion, “The Woman Behind Elizabeth Warren's Foreign Policy,” *The Nation*, February 18, 2020, <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/sasha-baker-elizabeth-warren-foreign-policy/>.

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be as progressive as Sanders or Warren, called for the repeal of the 2001 AUMF.⁶⁷ Interestingly, a vote of an amendment to S. 1 in 2019, which resolved, in part, that “the precipitous withdrawal of United States forces from [Iraq or Syria] country could put at risk hard-won gains and United States national security,” counted among its 20 Democratic (or independent, in the case of Sanders) dissenters six of the seven Senators running for the party’s nomination.⁶⁸

On the Republican side, Donald Trump was the first nominee in the post-World War II era to harken back to the past isolationist instincts of conservatism.⁶⁹ While Trump’s approach to foreign policy (and to the presidency more generally) since taking office is an outlier, his ascension to that position is a reflection and a catalyst of the potential end of the post-Cold War foreign policy era. As a candidate, Trump was adamant about his “America First” policy—which often translated to isolationism and especially an aversion to international organizations and established foreign policy norms. On trade, Trump constantly railed against past deals, namely NAFTA, and the cost they incurred for American workers, promising that he would tear up the deal on the first chance he got.

Trump also repudiated the concept of American global leadership—a hallmark of American foreign policy for decades—telling the *New York Times* in a 2016 interview “I don’t know that we have a right to lecture. Just look about what’s happening with our country. How

⁶⁷ Josh Lederman, “Buttigieg vows to seek repeal of post-9/11 war powers resolution,” *NBC News*, June 11, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/buttigieg-vows-seek-repeal-post-9-11-war-powers-resolution-n1016331>.

⁶⁸ These six “Nay” voters were Senators Booker (NJ), Gillibrand (NY), Harris (CA), Klobuchar (MN), Sanders (VT), and Warren (MA). The only presidential candidate to vote in support of this amendment was Bennet (CO). https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=116&session=1&vote=00013#position

⁶⁹ William Hitchcock “How the GOP Embraced the World—And Then Turned Away”, *Politico*, July 13, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/07/13/gop-isolationism-trump-eisenhower-219003>.

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are we going to lecture when people are shooting our policemen in cold blood. How are we going to lecture when you see the riots and the horror going on in our own country. (...) We're not in a position to be more aggressive. We have to fix our own mess.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, the President has repeatedly bemoaned the existence of NATO, and complained that other countries have not paid their fair share, going as far as telling the *Times* that he would be prepared to tell a country not paying up that they would have to defend themselves without the help of the United States.⁷¹ Trump also lamented the fact that the United States would be forced into defending countries that he deemed inconsequential, like Montenegro, if they were ever to be attacked.⁷² This aversion towards global leadership and an interconnected world stands in stark contrast to the talking points of his recent predecessors.

The legislature has, in certain instances, stood up for the status quo of American foreign policy in the face of pressure from the Trump administration, notably in its opposition to withdrawing troops from Syria and its decision to uphold sanctions on Russia. However, at other times, Congress has decided to push back against American intervention. The Sanders/Lee bill addressing the War in Yemen is arguably the most important example: It was a demonstration of a tangible, legislative accomplishment between representatives of America's progressive left and

⁷⁰ “Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey's Coup Attempt and the World,” *The New York Times* July 21, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/donald-trump-foreign-policy-interview.html>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² John Wagner, “Trump says defending tiny NATO ally Montenegro could lead to World War II,” *The Washington Post*, July 18, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-says-defending-tiny-nato-ally-montenegro-could-lead-to-world-war-iii/2018/07/18/f7a09276-8a80-11e8-8aea-86e88ae760d8_story.html.

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its libertarian right, and it concurrently challenged the growing power of the Executive in foreign affairs.

The lens through which American foreign policy is viewed is also shifting. In the past, debate over American foreign policy was limited by the shared belief in American exceptionalism and leadership being central to foreign policy decision making. While Zack Beauchamp of *Vox* contends that “Washington’s foreign policy debate tends to be mostly conducted between the center and the right. The issue is typically how much force America should use rather than whether it should use it at all, or how to tweak a free-trade agreement rather than whether it should be accepted at all,” the reality is that the discussion is constricted to an area on the political axis between the center-left and center-right, leaving little space for dissenting voices on either side.⁷³

Recent debates in Washington demonstrate how, even in the absence of tangible change, these parameters are not as impermeable as they once were. As Nikolas Gvosdev explains in the *National Interest*, in the aftermath of the vote condemning Trump’s withdrawal from Syria “The dominant narrative—of a surrender of U.S. leadership—prevailed, but the counter-narrative expressed by the President—why are we there—showed that it could gain traction.”⁷⁴ Trump’s approach to foreign policy, along with the increasing skepticism toward the post-Cold War

⁷³ Zack Beauchamp, “Why Democrats have no foreign policy ideas,” *Vox*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/9/5/16220054/democrats-foreign-policy-think-tanks>.

⁷⁴ Nikolas Gvosdev, “Can a 'Trumpian' Foreign Policy Stick?”, *The National Interest*, November 9, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/can-trumpian-foreign-policy-stick-95196>.

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consensus articulated on the left, have at least ensured that we can begin redefining our approach to foreign policy and asking the right questions before entering into another armed conflict.

There have also been other instances that have given credence to the idea that these two otherwise ideologically divergent factions have found a small window of overlap on this particular issue. In the run-up to the 2016 election, a number of left-wing journalists and intellectuals suggested that Trump, who appeared untethered to the American foreign policy establishment, represented a better chance at ending America's endless wars than did Hillary Clinton, who had been aligned with the past two Democratic presidential administrations, who had voted for the Iraq War in 2003, and who has been cited as one of the primary architects of the intervention in Libya.

Even since Trump has assumed office, some in favor of a more restrained foreign policy have voiced their support for his foreign policy impulses, though not always his policies. "Here's an uncomfortable truth," said Jeremy Scahill, the co-founder of the leftist publication *The Intercept*, in January 2019, "Donald Trump probably represents the best hope that we've had since 9/11 to actually end some of these forever wars." Scahill admits that he doesn't "trust anything that Trump says unless it's backed up by indisputable facts, but the mere reality that he's saying that he wants to get the US out of these wars requires those of us who oppose US militarism and hegemony to analyze this moment for the opportunity that it possibly presents."⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Jeremy Scahill, "Donald Trump is a Liar but he May Represent our Best Hope to End the US 'Forever Wars,'" *The Intercept*, January 22, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/01/22/donald-trump-is-a-liar-but-he-may-represent-our-best-hope-to-end-the-u-s-forever-wars/>.

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This sentiment has been reflected by other progressives who were among the most ardent critics of President Bush's foreign policy approach.

On the other side of the aisle, a number of pro-Trump conservatives, who have partially supported him due to his ostensible aversion to military conflict, have criticized the President when his actions do not match his campaign rhetoric. Tucker Carlson, one of the most popular hosts on Fox News, has debated guests on the validity of sending the US military to various Middle Eastern countries, namely Syria, Iran, and Iraq. With Trump seemingly on the verge of going to war with Iran in January 2020, Carlson told one interviewee “[w]e actually don’t face any domestic threat from Iran,” and asked another, “tell me how many Americans in the United States have been murdered by terrorists backed by Iran since 9/11?”⁷⁶ According to the liberal journalist Peter Beinart in *The Atlantic*, Carlson was “moderating a debate between the two strands of thinking that have dominated conservative foreign policy for roughly a century (...) Some conservatives oppose restraints on American sovereignty primarily because they want the U.S. to impose its will on other countries. (Think Dick Cheney.) Other conservatives oppose those restraints primarily because they want to prevent other countries from imposing their will on the United States. (Think Ron Paul.)”⁷⁷ Carlson’s way of thinking has also found a home with other conservatives, mostly those who would fall further to the right on the typical political spectrum.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Peter Beinart, “Tucker Carlson is Doing Something Extraordinary,” *The Atlantic*, July 13, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/tucker-carlson-is-doing-something-extraordinary/533586/>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

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The 2020 campaign has offered another opening for this agreement between right and left. Tulsi Gabbard, a representative from Hawai'i who failed to make inroads in the Democratic Primary for a number of reasons, made an avowed opposition to regime change wars the center of her presidential campaign. She formed a small yet interesting coalition of anti-imperialist leftists and isolationist or pro-Russia voters who might otherwise have supported Trump. In fact, a University of New Hampshire poll of the state's primary in early 2002 showed that Gabbard had the support of 28% of respondents who identified as Republican, 7% of independents and only 2% of Democrats.⁷⁸ These kinds of polls demonstrate how Gabbard's campaign simultaneously deterred voters from her own party while also bringing in others who would not typically support a Democratic candidate, perhaps disillusioned Trump supporters who were primarily drawn in by his "America First" foreign policy.

The final notable example of this growing counter-coalition is the 2020 foundation of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a think tank funded by mega donors on the left (George Soros) and the right (Charles Koch). As described in the second chapter, think tanks have typically served the interests of the neoconservative/liberal internationalists foreign policy consensus. Yet, the Quincy Institute, named after former President John Quincy Adams, who said in 1821 that America "goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy," states that it "promotes ideas that move U.S. foreign policy away from endless war and toward vigorous diplomacy in the pursuit of international peace," and it is led by Andrew Bacevich, a self-described conservative who has been among the most poignant critics of establishment

⁷⁸ Sean P. McKinley, Zachary S. Azem and Andrew E. Smith, "Sanders, Warren & Biden Remain Top Among NH Dem Voters; Trump Holds Massive Lead Over GOP Rivals," University of New Hampshire Survey Center, October 29, 2019, https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1567&context=survey_center_polls.

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foreign policy for more than two decades.⁷⁹ The Quincy Institute brands itself as explicitly “transpartisan” and employs experts from across the political spectrum. David Klion, a progressive journalist for *The Nation* writes that the Quincy Institute represents a “critique not only of neoconservatives like [co-founder of PNAC Bill] Kristol but also of liberal interventionists like Samantha Power, Barack Obama’s UN ambassador, who see a responsibility to protect vulnerable communities by the use of military force as a core principle of US foreign policy.”⁸⁰ Each of these situations have offered glimpses into a future in which military intervention is seen as a last resort, and not the first step towards solving any crisis.

To be sure, there are notable, meaningful differences between the left-wing vision for a non-interventionist foreign policy and its right-wing alternative. As the sentiments put forth by people like Duss and Baker express, the broad vision for a progressive foreign policy include a reorientation towards diplomacy, an admission that the United States has not historically been only a force for good, and consistent concern for human rights abuses. As it stands, according to these progressives, the United States has been very selective in its opposition to human rights abuses; feigning outrage when they emerge from historic adversaries like Iran and Cuba, but turning a blind eye when the perpetrators are allies like Saudi Arabia or Israel.

The right-wing opposition to intervention appears to stem from the libertarian belief that money spent on other countries is fiscally irresponsible, and the populist wing’s sentiment that the turn towards globalism has been a failure that has unfairly burdened the American taxpayer and the American soldier. These feelings have typically been manifested in aversion towards

⁷⁹ “Mission Statement,” *Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft*, <https://quincyinst.org/about/>.

⁸⁰ David Klion, “Can a New Think Tank Put a Stop to Endless War?,” *The Nation*, July 29, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/quincy-institute-responsible-statecraft-think-tank/>.

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military over-extension and opposition to trade deals. Otherwise, many of the ideals originate from some of the same racist feelings that have been a driver of Republican domestic policy under Trump. Leaked recordings from 2006 and 2008 show Fox News host Carlson, who in many ways has become the symbolic representation of the anti-war right, saying ““I hate the war ... I just have zero sympathy for them [Iraqis] or their culture. A culture where people just don’t use toilet paper or forks.” and “Iraq is a crappy place filled with a bunch of, you know, semiliterate primitive monkeys. That’s why it wasn’t worth invading.”⁸¹ These quotes hardly seem consistent with Duss’ assertion that dignity and human rights be central to American foreign policy.

Beyond the different sources for their discomfort with the foreign policy consensus, the left and the right also seem to disagree over the role of international organizations and the role of the military within the larger scope of American foreign policy. The left generally speaks about the United States remaining engaged with the world, but doing more diplomatically and by using alliances with other countries. The right tends to favor a more isolationist approach, but a tendency towards the military when engagement is required.

This tendency is perhaps best represented by Trump, who, despite shunning the need for alliances and international organizations, has praised American military strength, and has had no problem threatening to use this strength, even in unconventional and at times illegal ways. But his willingness to exert this power is not rooted in a desire to spread any values or beliefs, but

⁸¹ Madeline Peltz, “Tucker Carlson's anti-war posture has been racist since the Bush era,” *Media Matters for America*, January 9, 2020, <https://www.mediamatters.org/tucker-carlson/tucker-carlsons-anti-war-posture-has-been-racist-bush-era>.

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rather simply to demonstrate that the United States is stronger than all other countries. Even if it can be argued that most American Presidents have acted primarily in their own self-interest on the global stage, Trump is a rare leader who has not even rhetorically emphasized the United States' role as a champion for democracy. While Trump has not brought in many of the voices who played a role in foreign affairs for his Republican predecessors, one of the few former government officials was one of the most hawkish members of the second Bush administration, Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, who served as Trump's third National Security Advisor. The appointment of Bolton, who has openly advocated for wars in North Korea and Iran, along with many of Trump's own statements, indicate that he has been itching for a war for much of his first term in office.

Trump's support for militarism, if not military intervention, is also evidenced by his relaxing of the regulations limiting drone warfare under Obama. Though drone warfare's covert nature means that finding entirely accurate data is difficult, a report published in *The Daily Beast* states that "Obama launched 186 drone strikes in Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan during his first two years in office. In Trump's first two years, he launched 238." Moreover, "the Trump administration has carried out 176 strikes in Yemen in just two years, compared with 154 there during all eight years of Obama's tenure, according to a count by The Associated Press and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism."⁸²

Given the differences in approach from the two sides of this proposed coalition, the concept of "transpartisanship" echoed throughout the Quincy Institute's website, is paramount to

⁸² S.E. Cupp, "Under Donald Trump, drone strikes far exceed Obama's numbers," *Chicago Sun-Times*, May 8, 2019, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/2019/5/8/18619206/under-donald-trump-drone-strikes-far-exceed-obama-s-numbers>.

any potential future success in this endeavour. Trita Parsi, the Institute's executive Vice President explains: "Bipartisanship is when you have two sides, they disagree, and then they come to an agreement with some sort of compromise that neither side is really happy with." Transpartisanship, contrarily is when "you have two sides, they disagree on a whole bunch of issues, but they have overlapping views. Neither side compromises. They're just collaborating on issues they already are in agreement over."⁸³ Some previous literature on the topic of cross-party coalition building has suggested that more moderate and longer-tenured members of the legislature are more likely to engage with members of the other party than more ideologically extreme and newer members.⁸⁴ This would theoretically be problematic for this particular coalition, as many of the anti-war voices on either side tend to be in the minority for their party and tend to have assumed office more recently.

For example, nine of the 11 Republican Congressmen who voted both to withdraw troops from Yemen and against House Joint Resolution 77, a resolution condemning the decision to end United States efforts to prevent Turkish military operations against Syrian Kurdish forces in Northeast Syria were elected to the House since 2011, and seven of them are members of the far-right Freedom Caucus.⁸⁵ On the Democratic side, the movement is a combination of old-school anti-war figures such as Sanders and Senator Jeff Merkley, and a younger generation

⁸³ Klion, "Can a New Think Tank Put a Stop to Endless War?"

⁸⁴ Lynda W. Powell, Constructing Bipartisan Coalitions to Pass Legislation, *Social Science Research Council*, (2020), <https://items.ssrc.org/democracy-papers/constructing-bipartisan-coalitions-to-pass-legislation/>.

⁸⁵ The 11 members are Congress are: Andy Biggs (AZ), Mo Brooks (AL), Warren Davidson (OH), Matt Gaetz (FL), Louie Gohmert (TX), Trey Hollingsworth (IN), Jim Jordan (OH), Thomas Massie (KY), Mark Meadows (NC), Alex Mooney (WV), and Bill Posey (FL).

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of officials who have been elected in the past decade, such as Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Pramila Jayapal, and Ro Khanna.

However, even if these two sides ultimately have divergent worldviews and hope to decrease intervention for different reasons, the one thing that they do agree on represents massive progress. “There is a potential for forging a coalition between people on the right who don’t like the direction of US policy and people on the left,” says Bacevich, “We don’t have to agree with one another on issues not related to America’s role in the world, but there’s plenty of room for agreement with regard to America’s role in the world.”⁸⁶ Intervention and militarism have been embraced by such a powerful bipartisan consensus for generations that any deviation from it is an impressive accomplishment.

Such a re-thinking would also allow a more fully-fledged debate on where to spend the United States’ limited resources; resources which up until now have often been tied up in massive military budgets. As Gsovdev explains it, there is agreement on both sides of the political aisle that “U.S. involvement in the international system must be amended—with a renewed focus on how American policy abroad connects to the doorstep issues of average Americans.”⁸⁷ Although someone like Trump would ultimately spend this money in radically different ways than Sanders or Warren, competing domestic priorities need not come in the way of reducing America’s military footprint. “‘Once we significantly reduce the military budget, we can argue about how to use the money,’ says [Quincy Institute member Stephen]

⁸⁶ Klion, “Can a New Think Tank Put a Stop to Endless War?”

⁸⁷ Gvosdev, “Can a 'Trumpian' Foreign Policy Stick?”

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Wertheim—that is, whether the savings from a slashed Pentagon budget should be invested in social programs or used to pay for tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans.”⁸⁸

Although many may have come to the conclusion that the liberal democratic world order ended in failure, this way of thinking reigned for at least three decades, and its promoters reached the highest levels of power, getting to the point in which, in elite echelons of government discourse, this view of foreign policy was never seriously challenged. By those measures, the liberal interventionist/neoconservative alliance was a success. By putting aside their difference in approach, this worldview reigned over the world for multiple Presidencies. If this newly-proposed concept of “transpartisanship” and restraint can successfully work, permitting these two sides of the political aisle to put aside the differences and come together on the one issue on which they agree, the United States might be able to redefine its role on the world stage. However, can a coalition built around opposed worldviews with only certain overlaps in how to get there, ultimately succeed in the same way that its predecessor was able to?

V: Imagining the Unimaginable: Can a Non-Interventionist Foreign Policy Take Hold?

The liberal internationalist/neoliberal coalition maintained its grip on foreign policy for a number of reasons. The fall of the Soviet Union permitted the United States to more freely pursue its vision for a world guided by American values and precipitated by American action. This was a worldview that was appealing to both Democrats and Republicans. Despite a difference in approaches, both sides were often willing to compromise if the ultimate

⁸⁸ Klion, “Can a New Think Tank Put a Stop to Endless War?”

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goals—spreading democracy, protecting human rights, upholding globalization, and defending American interests—were met. The factors that created the post-Cold War consensus also made that way of thinking very hard to dislodge.

This full embrace of American exceptionalism, along with the turn towards the military as the primary tool to accomplish these goals, left the United States in something akin to perpetual war. The trend in the direction of militarization has become further entrenched due to the military-industrial complex, bloated DOD budgets that leave the military with responsibilities that they (and all other elements of the US government) are unable to fulfill, increased presidential power at the expense of Congress, and an inability from politicians to adequately express when and how the military should be used. In order to unwind this consensus, each of these factors will need to be challenged.

The above section suggests that, given the domestic political conditions, the status quo may be ripe for such a re-thinking. Members of both sides of the political aisle have questioned the success of the era of American Exceptionalism, and many of these people have openly mused about the possibility of a left- and right-wing coalition centered on a non-interventionist foreign policy. The question is whether this moment is a signal—or whether it is noise: Can it really lead to a radical re-alignment of US foreign policy, or is it only a blip on the radar that will prove unable to replace the liberal internationalist/neoconservative status quo?

While it is likely true that, as Gvosdev argues “Americans are never going to be isolationists—because U.S. security and prosperity do depend on U.S. interaction with the rest of the world,” there is still space for accomplishment that does not include populists or progressives

transforming America's role in the world.⁸⁹ Indeed, neither side claims to desire an isolationist country, instead they seek to question the “the degree and depth of that interaction” with the rest of the world.⁹⁰ Will this new coalition be able to put aside their differences, make decision-makers reconsider their impulses towards military intervention, and put forth a clear vision of what American statesmanship could look like? Is the current rhetorical aversion to intervention a short-term one that will be overcome or can it develop into something more sustained? The following paragraph will address potential obstacles and seek to explore how they may be overcome.

The first problem that arises is that this coalition is largely formed by minority voices within their own party, often on questions beyond the realm of foreign policy. Although Trump and Sanders suggest some kind of deviation, the leadership of both parties tends to have been in government longer and mostly still abides by the thinking of the past consensus. However, although, as Lynda Powell suggests—and conventional wisdom usually holds—cross-party coalitions are usually formed by members closer to the political system, David Epstein offers a theoretical framework for why such a coalition may be attainable, writing “it is exactly those majority members with extreme preferences who most need support from the minority party (...) to pass their preferred legislation.”⁹¹

This concept may explain why Senators like Sanders and Lee, who often make enemies within their own party, would similarly need each other's help in order to pass the Yemen Bill.

⁸⁹ Gvosdev, “Can a 'Trumpian' Foreign Policy Stick?”.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ David Epstein, “Legislating from Both Sides of the Aisle: Information and the Value of Bipartisan Consensus,” *Public Choice* 101, no. 1/2 (1999): 20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/30026107.pdf>.

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Still, this bill remains one isolated example in which the legislation had a particular, concrete goal. When it comes to accomplishing a wider-ranging goal of re-defining American foreign policy, legislation will have to answer questions where these two sides do not agree. For example: Should the United States roll back its commitments to defending NATO allies? Should the American government engage diplomatically with Iran and Cuba? Should Congress vote to reduce the Pentagon's budget? On questions like these, the populist right's view diverges significantly from that of the progressive left. A 2016 study by D.J. Flynn and Laurel Harbridge determines that on "consensus issues" (where the opposing sides agree on the goal, if not the means) a legislative "loss" is preferable to gridlock where on "non-consensus issues," gridlock is preferred to the opposing side accomplishing their goals, suggesting that the public would not accept a legislative "loss" on questions such as these.⁹²

This emerging coalition, therefore, struggles to directly confront the reasons for the entrenchment of intervention and militarism in the United States government. While the criticism from the left encompasses many of the problems addressed throughout this paper, the right-wing opposition seems more catered toward withdrawal without a broader vision of how the United States should be engaged with the rest of the world.

The next roadblock is that, like its predecessor, this coalition does not have clear guidelines to determine what foreign policy should look like, or when, if ever, the United should intervene militarily. The military intervention of the first Gulf War is widely viewed as having

⁹² D.J. Flynn and Laurel Harbridge, "How Partisan Conflict in Congress Affects Public Opinion: Strategies, Outcomes and Issue Differences," *Sage Journals* 44, no. 5 (2016): 882, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1532673X15610425>.

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been successful, partially because the United States was able to halt the overreach of a foreign country and then withdraw itself from the conflict. However, in more recent iterations such as in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Libya, it has proved more difficult for the missions to avoid devolving into a regime change or nation building project. Members of both the progressive and populist wings can agree that these decisions turned out catastrophically, but there doesn't seem to be an agreement on when military engagement is justified. It would be difficult for the left, who remain committed to the protection of human rights, to turn a blind eye to a genocide; much as many on the right would be inclined to exert the full strength of the military if they thought US domination was at risk. Today, the populist right has already articulated that China, the world's second largest economy, is a far greater threat than historical geopolitical rivals like Iran or Russia, who have been the bogeymen of the Republican party for a generation.⁹³

The increased partisan nature of American politics may also serve as a roadblock for this coalition. While the established consensus often managed to supersede partisan politics between the Cold War and today, a bipartisan coalition formed in a time of such partisan rancor may be more difficult to uphold. While public opinion continues to theoretically support bipartisan solutions, research shows that, when presented with tangible examples, respondents tended more towards partisan solutions than bipartisan ones.⁹⁴

Trump's election has not only increased general partisanship, but created a particularly tricky case study for the plausibility of minority members from both sides joining forces. While

⁹³ Rachel Esplin Odell and Stephen Wertheim, "Can the Democrats Avoid Trump's China Trap?," *The New York Times*, May 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/10/opinion/china-coronavirus-trump.html>.

⁹⁴ Laurel Harbridge, Neil Malhotra, and Brian F. Harrison. "Public Preferences for Bipartisanship in the Policymaking Process." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 39, no. 3 (2014): 327-355, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/lsq.12048>.

some leftists in academia and journalism have half-heartedly embraced Trump's desire for withdrawal, anti-war Democratic politicians have been more hesitant to agree with his chaotic approach to foreign policy. For example, every Democrat in Congress recently voted in opposition to Trump's announcement that he would withdraw all American troops from Syria. "President Trump campaigned and won on a less interventionist foreign policy. This has emboldened some Republicans to follow their conscience on this issue," Congressman Massie told the *American Conservative* after the vote regarding the withdrawal from Syria, "But sadly, at the same time, it's caused the media and some congressmen on the anti-war left to switch positions."⁹⁵ While some of this opposition stems from the fact that this withdrawal was hastily thought out and would leave the United States' Kurdish allies vulnerable, it demonstrates that there is still some trepidation about removing combat troops from the Middle East. Others who favor a more restrained or progressive foreign policy have warned Democrats to not instinctively go against Trump, fearing that doing so would only perpetuate liberal internationalism as the correct view on foreign policy and warning that such opposition may lead to the left countering positions that they may have previously supported.⁹⁶

So long as the opposition to militarism and intervention is a reflexive, negative vision, instead of a positive one, it will be difficult for it to become fully realized. Liberal internationalists and neoconservatives managed to, in some way, define the world that they

⁹⁵ Quoted in Hunter Derensis, "The Small But Brave Cadre Of Conservative Anti-War Republicans," *The American Conservative*, November 19, 2019,

<https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-brave-cadre-of-conservative-anti-war-republicans/>.

⁹⁶ Robert Malley and Marc Lynch, "Beware the Blob: How not to Oppose Donald Trump," *Politico Magazine*, February 23, 2017,

<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/02/the-wrong-way-to-oppose-donald-trump-214818>.

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wanted: One in which openness and freedom reigned, and American ideals of liberal democracy and capitalism could spread freely. Even one the most ardent advocates of foreign policy restraint, Stephen Walt, agrees that “it's easier to understand what restrainers *don't* want. They don't want endless wars, bloated military budgets, and security commitments that keep expanding, but are never seriously debated or approved by the public.”⁹⁷

The “manifesto” that Walt lays out tries to explain what a policy of restraint would look like, instead of what it would *not* look like, but his policy prescriptions seems to be a mix of progressive goals such as desiring “More Diplomacy and Less Coercion;” conservative aspirations like “U.S. Allies to Bear a Fair Share of Defense Burden;” and tenets of the foreign policy school of realism, including “Business-like Relations with All Countries and Special Relations with None.”⁹⁸ None of these three, or any of the other goals laid out by Walt are implausible on their own, but they appear unlikely to combine into a coherent foreign policy in either a Democratic or Republican administration.

⁹⁷ Stephen Walt, “A Manifesto For Restrainers,” *Responsible Statecraft*, December 4, 2019, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2019/12/04/a-manifesto-for-restrainers/>.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Section D: Conclusion

VI: Looking Ahead

None of this is to say that the current, sustained, and bipartisan pushback against interventionism is not an enormously important moment. Even if the only real point of agreement between the two sides is to limit war and military overreach, that would represent a tremendous accomplishment. Following Operation Desert Storm, “as the president himself proclaimed, the United States *had* ‘kicked the Vietnam Syndrome,’” or the aversion to getting entangled in foreign conflicts without making any measurable progress.⁹⁹ It appears as if, for approximately the past decade, the United States has suffered from a similar kind of “Iraq syndrome.” Obama, despite his inability to transform American statesmanship, did not get the United States involved in large scale foreign conflict. Even in Syria, when the president was under heavy pressure, including from those of his own party, members of his administration, and even his own words, Obama elected not to send in ground troops.¹⁰⁰

Trump, for all his bravado, baiting, and escalatory rhetoric, has consistently backed off at the last minute from engaging in wars with Venezuela and Iran. The fact that both these men, who, despite being complete opposites in so many ways, ran while speaking about America’s place in the world in ways usually unseen at the presidential level, is encouraging. At the same time, the reality is that their respective tenures as the primary architect of American foreign

⁹⁹ Bacevich, *American Empire*, 59.

¹⁰⁰ Ben Rhodes, “Inside the White House During the Syrian ‘Red Line’ Crisis,” *The Atlantic*, June 3, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/inside-the-white-house-during-the-syrian-red-line-crisis/561887/>.

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policy too often fell back into the so-called “Washington playbook,” indicating the difficulty in overturning this entrenched way of thinking.

Joe Biden, should he be elected President, will provide an interesting case study. Biden, who was first elected to the Senate the 1970s, is an embodiment of the Democratic establishment who in the past helped craft the response to the Balkan crisis and voted in support of the second Iraq War, and will likely surround himself with many of the same advisors who staffed the Obama administration.¹⁰¹ At the same time, Biden has, at times, demonstrated restraint impulses, and has shown himself to be a malleable politician.¹⁰² While Biden does not represent the ideological shift away from liberal internationalism, if popular will is indeed shifting that way, his policy approach may reflect this shift.¹⁰³ Biden has also made overtures to the Sanders campaign, in hopes of hiring some of his former rivals’ foreign policy team.¹⁰⁴

Biden’s view of foreign policy—a focus on globalism, cooperation, openness, and American leadership—is unlikely to deviate from his predecessors’, but perhaps his specific prescriptions will. While a hypothetical Biden administration may not shift away from military reliance, it could nonetheless demonstrate the significance of the movement toward non-intervention. While neither the “Vietnam syndrome” nor the “Iraq syndrome” have managed to completely dissuade American presidents from using the military as a major tool (Between Vietnam and the first Gulf War, the United States still used the military for interventions in

¹⁰¹ Branko Marcetic, “Joe Biden, the Hawk,” *Jacobin*, August 2, 2018, <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/08/joe-biden-democratic-party-military-hawk>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Thomas Wright, “The quiet reformation of Biden’s foreign policy,” *Brookings*, March 20, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/03/20/the-quiet-reformation-of-bidens-foreign-policy/>.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew Petti, “Bernie Sanders Foreign Policy Advisors Invited To Biden Camp,” *National Interest*, April 14, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/bernie-sanders-foreign-policy-advisors-invited-biden-camp-144257>.

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Grenada and elsewhere. Similarly, since the war in Iraq concluded, the United States intervened in Libya, initiated a surge in Afghanistan, and relied on its military to solve problems in other international arenas,) they have led to a decrease in the large-scale interventions that have represented the most catastrophic American foreign policy failures.

A non-interventionist, bipartisan coalition appears to have created a strong foundation over the past few years. Though this coalition has made some tangible gains, and may continue to exert pressure on the nation's most important decision makers, a transformational moment in American statesmanship is more difficult to envision. It is more straightforward to create a solid coalition when worldviews parallel each other, and the primary divergence is a question of tactics, not of goals. The concessions that either side would have to make for a populist/progressive coalition to become an actuality are too great, and, at the moment, too hypothetical. The two sides don't necessarily agree on what the problem they are confronting is—globalization on one end, militarism on the other—and have yet to articulate a clear vision for what the replacement can look like. Anti-interventionists will surely have a few meaningful victories and make leaders think twice before they involve the military in any overseas mission. But unless and until restraint advocates directly confront the questions of militarism and American exceptionalism, and articulate a clear, principled, and realistic vision to replace it, it will not manage a complete overhaul of American foreign policy, and it may only take another international crisis for the Commander-in-Chief to reflexively turn to the militarism once again.

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