

**Foreword to Japanese translation of**  
***Winning the Peace:***  
***America and World Order in the New Era***  
**(Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009)**

**“American Exceptionalism vs. Exemptionalism: Shifting Balances”**

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I wrote this book at a time of serious reflection in the United States about the international framework needed to secure the post-cold war peace. President George H. W. Bush and his successor, William Jefferson Clinton, both drew on a vision of world order and America’s place in it that coupled an appreciation of the role of American power with the desirability of multilateral principles and frameworks.

More than any other country, the United States had been responsible for creating the post-World War II system of global governance. For Franklin Roosevelt, the key challenge was to overcome the isolationist legacy of the 1930s and to ensure sustained U.S. engagement in achieving and maintaining a stable international order. Old world balance-of-power reasoning in support of that mission held little allure for the American people – protected by two oceans, with friendly and weaker neighbors to the North and South, and pulled unwillingly into two costly world wars in the span of a single generation by that system’s breakdown. Accordingly, Roosevelt framed his plans for winning the peace in a broader vision that tapped into America’s sense of self as a nation: a modest form of constitutionalism embodying rules and institutions that would promote human betterment through American-led collective security, free trade and stable money, human rights and decolonization, as well as active international involvement by the private and voluntary sectors. For Roosevelt’s successors, the need to counter the Soviet threat reinforced the mission and, in many respects, made it easier to achieve at home and abroad. This form of American exceptionalism became the basis for a global transformational agenda whose effects are unfolding still.

In doing so, America pursued its own interests, to be sure. But it defined those interests sufficiently broadly and over a long enough time horizon for them to be framed within a rules-based system that encouraged not merely acquiescence but active participation by other and lesser powers. Others saw their own interests taken into account and were given an institutionalized role in the system’s management. The United States also preserved the right and exercised the option to act unilaterally. But when it did, more often than not it framed the deviation in ways that sought to make it appear consistent if not with the letter than at least the spirit of the rules – thereby acknowledging their legitimacy. John F. Kennedy’s measured response to the Cuban missile crisis – still the most serious security threat the United States faced in all of

postwar history – comes to mind. In contrast, when the U.S. offered no persuasive basis for the international legitimacy of its actions it often paid a heavy price, as in Vietnam long before Iraq.

In short, while the postwar order was based on a structure of power that pivoted around the United States, it also enjoyed widespread ideational appeal and normative support, coming to be valued in its own right and in large measure even viewed by others as the natural order of things. Perhaps the decline of this unusual liberal internationalist edifice would have been inevitable, in light of the emerging power shifts we are witnessing in the world at large. But the global governance policies and practices of the Bush administration have brought it on with the speed and searing intensity of lightning, while making it exceedingly difficult ever to reconstruct fully the world we have lost.

At the same time, we must not over-romanticize the past. From the start, America's postwar project exhibited the conflicting effects of two very different forms of American exceptionalism. The vision Roosevelt evoked was one. But all along the United States also has sought to insulate itself from the domestic blowback of certain of the rules and institutions it helped to create. While the executive branch traditionally drove the multilateralist agenda, the "exemptionalist" resistance was anchored in Congress. In drafting the United Nations charter, for example, the U.S. delegation introduced language "reaffirming faith" in fundamental human rights. But because the support of Southern Democrats was critical to the charter's ratification by the Senate, keeping Jim Crow laws beyond international scrutiny obliged the U.S. to balance that reaffirmation by adding what became Article 2.7: that "nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state."

Reacting sharply against U.S.-initiated negotiations of several UN human rights instruments, beginning with the genocide convention, the Senate nearly adopted a constitutional amendment in 1954 – the Bricker amendment – which, in effect, would have eviscerated the president's formal treaty-making powers. In addition to the existing ratification requirement of a 2/3 Senate super-majority, the amendment would have required subsequent implementing legislation by both houses of Congress and approval by all state legislatures. As part of a deal with the Senate, President Eisenhower was forced to withdraw from further negotiations on international human rights instruments the United States itself had introduced. That same domestic political constituency historically has resisted all forms of international jurisdiction and has spearheaded Congressional opposition to the United Nations – Senator Homer Ferguson, Republican of Michigan, sponsoring a resolution as early as 1948 threatening the creation of a new international institution if the impediment of Soviet vetoes in the UN Security Council were not removed.

During the cold war, presidents from Harry Truman to Bush senior sought to minimize the international embarrassment resulting from the exemptionalist impulse, especially in relation to civil rights, often acting through executive agreements or other such means when treaty ratification was beyond reach. Starting in the 1990s, however, a

broader and more unrestrained exemptionalist opposition to global governance emerged. Its intellectual agenda was driven by the conservative think tanks established in the 1980s to create a permanent legacy for the so-called Reagan revolution. But its success also reflected the end of the external disciplining effects that the cold war rivalry had imposed, as U.S. foreign policy became subjected far more extensively to a domestic politics that itself was increasingly polarized. In the 1994 mid-term Congressional election exemptionalism captured both House and Senate – on the basis of a common Republican platform called “Contract with America,” which claimed, among other things, that “the Clinton administration appears to salute the day when American men and women will fight, and die, ‘in the service’ of the United Nations.” In January 2001 that same political movement took over the White House as well.

More than a half-century after the Bricker amendment, race is no longer the overpowering political driver of the exemptionalist quest that it once was. Its base today is animated by a more diffuse set of social issues that also include abortion, gay rights, gun control, capital punishment, unfettered property rights, and the role of religion in politics and policymaking – coupled with distrust of government and, therefore, even more so of international entities. Since 9/11, of course, exemptionalism has been reinforced by the existential fear of terrorism. A look at a “red states/blue states” electoral map of the United States indicates, however, that the exemptionalist base has not traveled far since the Ohio Senator for whom it was named introduced his nearly successful amendment. But it became increasingly powerful as a result of the political realignment that began in 1968 when George Wallace first started to peel Southern white working class voters away from the electoral coalition that FDR had constructed in support of his domestic and international agendas; Richard Nixon then made this so-called southern strategy the very basis for an emerging Republican majority.

In short, there has been a tension in America all along regarding its preferred vision of world order—one between *exceptionalism*, and the impetus it has given to multilateral organizing principles; and *exemptionalism*, seeking to decouple the United States from the rules-based system it had itself promoted while justifying that posture in a doctrinal form of unilateralism. As long as the Soviet threat constrained the United States, the balance between the two favored the exceptionalist variant; beginning in the 1990s, and especially after the attacks of 9/11, exemptionalism trumped.

So where do we stand today? What do these developments augur for the future? Today, it appears that the exemptionalist/unilateralist run may be coming to an end, the victim of its own failures. This is evident in domestic and foreign policy alike.

The American political system has begun once again to demonstrate the resilience of its design. On the issue of how to treat detainees in the amorphous war on terror, for example, the country is re-learning the core civics lesson that we have three branches of government, not only one. A conservative-leaning Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled against the Bush administration, and Senator Lindsey Graham, a conservative Republican from South Carolina, described his efforts to sustain the Geneva conventions against administration efforts to weaken them as “a signal about who America is.” On the critical

challenge of climate change, we are rediscovering the virtues of federalism and pluralism, as states and cities have taken the lead in the absence of policy at the national level – even the business community, fearing potential future liabilities and also seeing opportunities, has become actively engaged by adopting voluntary emissions caps. The successful pushback against the Bush administration’s attempt to privatize social security demonstrated that even amidst the deepest partisan divisions a sense of social solidarity continues to prevail. And Iraq has forced neoconservative pundits to acknowledge that there is no linear relationship between military power and international legitimacy – and, even more important, that legitimacy matters.

The international realm provides additional indicators. Traditional allies have been alienated, the major emerging economies are beginning to flex their political muscles, and Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations,” which seemed oddly hyperbolic a decade ago, appears ever closer to becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy in relations with large parts of the Islamic world. Some of these developments are well beyond American control, but others have been severely exacerbated by recent U.S. policies. A return to earlier forms of multilateralism seems inevitable, therefore, even as the United States, like all great powers, will continue to reserve its right to defend its interests alone if necessary.

The great unknown in the equation is how deep the damage is that recent American policy has inflicted on its own basis of legitimacy and moral authority to serve as chief international norm entrepreneur—a role it played so successfully through the post-World War II era. The U.S. possessed an enormous reservoir of soft power, in Joseph Nye’s terminology, by virtue of the fact that the universal values for which we stand and which we promoted came to define the norms of civilized behavior among states and peoples. Here the potential loss to America—and to the world—is potentially greatest. Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, the torture memos, rendition, illegal domestic wiretapping – these acts amount to the moral equivalent of asset stripping, because it is difficult if not impossible to invoke the power of norms against others when we ourselves raise their violation to the level of official doctrine. Rebuilding this asset base constitutes the most profound foreign policy challenge for the new president, be he Barack Obama or John McCain. In broad terms, the policy framework outlined in this book continues to provide practical guidance for efforts to articulate and sustain an effective and stable global order.