

# Global Realignment: How Bush Inspired a New World Order

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Region: [USA](#)

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The series of unfortunate and costly decisions made during the two terms of the Bush administration, combined with economic decline at home, might devastate the US's world standing much sooner than most analysts predict. What was difficult to foresee was that the weakening of US global dominance, spurred by erratic and unwise foreign policy under Bush, would re-ignite the Cold War, to a degree, over a largely distant and seemingly ethnically-based conflict — that of Georgia and Russia. Who could have predicted a possible association between Baghdad, Kabul and Tbilisi?

But to date the decline of US global power to the advent of the Bush administration, or even the horrific events of 11 September 2001, is not exactly accurate. The rapid collapse of the Soviet Union and the unravelling of the Warsaw Pact — especially as former members of that pact hurried to join NATO in later years — empowered a new breed of US elite who boasted of the economic viability and moral supremacy of US-styled “Capitalism and Democracy”. But a unipolar world presented the US leadership with an immense, if not an insurmountable task.

While 9/11 and a gung-ho president presented a convenient opportunity to reassert US global dominance, action was taken the moment the Soviet Union collapsed. Such efforts, however, were not accentuated until 1997, with the establishment of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a think tank from which many neo-conservative policy advisors operated. Their aim was “to promote American global leadership... [which] is both good for America and good for the world.” William Kristol and Robert Kagan, PNAC founders, were inspired by the Reaganite policy of “strength and moral clarity”. But that supposedly inspiring model was justified on the basis of the Cold War, which no longer existed. Fashioning an enemy was a time-sensitive and essential task to justify the repositioning of US power to reclaim domains that were left vacant with the disappearance of the bipolar international system, which existed since World War II.

Even the PNAC's more recent report, *Rebuilding America's Defences: Strategies, Forces, and Resources For a New Century*, published in 2000, appeared of little relevance and urgency. It expressed the “belief that America should seek to preserve and extend its position of global leadership by maintaining the pre-eminence of US military forces”. The report would have been another neglected document were it not for the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which turned it into a doctrine defining US foreign policies for nearly a decade.

The wars and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq were aimed at strengthening the US hand in protecting its interests and managing its international affairs. Afghanistan's position was

strategic in warding off the growth of the rising powers of Asia — aside from its military and strategic value, it was hoped to become a major energy supply route — while Iraq was to provide a permanent US military presence to guard its oil interests in the whole region and to ensure Israeli supremacy over its weaker, but rebellious Arab foes.

The plan worked well for a few weeks following the declaration of “Mission Accomplished” in Iraq. Since then, the US has learned that managing world affairs with a decidedly military approach is a recipe for disaster. Faced with foreign occupation, Iraqis fought back, creating a nightmare scenario and promising US defeat in their country. The US’s original plan to exploit the country’s fractious ethnic and religious groupings also backfired, as shifting alliances made it impossible for the US to single out a permanent enemy or a long-term ally. In Afghanistan, the picture is even more bleak as the country’s unforgivable geography, the corruption of US local allies, resurgence of the Taliban, and the US-led coalition’s brutal response to the Taliban’s emboldened ascension, has rendered Afghanistan a lost cause by any reasonable military standard.

But the trigger-happy mentality that has governed US foreign policy during the Bush years is no longer dominant and has been since challenged by a more sensible, dialogue-based foreign policy approach, as championed, reluctantly, by Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama. The change of heart is not entirely moralistic, however, but largely pragmatic. According to a survey conducted jointly by Foreign Policy magazine and the Centre for a New American Security, published 19 February 2008, 88 per cent of present and former US military officers believe that the demands of the Iraq war alone have “stretched the US military dangerously thin”. Although not “broken”, 80 per cent believe it is “unreasonable to expect the US military to wage another major war successfully at present”, as reported by CNN. Such estimation is not too different from similar assessments provided by top US military commanders, most of who found their way to early retirement for similar reasons.

The new military limitations faced by the US in the Middle East have also resulted in the weakening of US political sway and standing. More, its regional allies have also suffered one blow after another: Israel in Lebanon, Georgia in South Ossetia, US allies in Venezuela and other South American countries, etc. Indeed, it is a matter of time before a challenger to US global hegemony arises and tests US resolve under new circumstances. While growing US involvement in Eurasia and its missile defence shield was considered part and parcel of the neo-con plan for “rebuilding America’s defences”, it was considered by Russia a threat to its national security.

The Georgian invasion of South Ossetia represented a golden opportunity for Moscow to send an unmistakable message to Washington. By crushing the US-Israeli trained Georgian army, Russia declared itself a contender to unchallenged US global dominance, which had lasted for nearly two decades. Countries such as Iran and Syria are quickly warming up to the new Russia, as the latter seeks to rebuild its own alliances and defences.

The nature and the direction of the US-Russian confrontation are yet to be determined with any reasonable preciseness. Internal and external factors for Russia itself (corruption, the oligarchs, and its ability to court a stable alliance) will all prove consequential in the current confrontation. What is clear, however, is that the upcoming US president will find himself face-to-face with a drastically altered world order, one that is defined by military pandemonium, national and global economic decline, and the rise of new powers, all vying to fill a widening, chaotic power vacuum, provided courtesy of the Bush administration.

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