

Obama and American Global Leadership

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In the history of U.S. foreign policy, the insistence upon “American global leadership” has been articulated and defended by every occupant of the White House since the end of World War II in 1945.

President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton are enthusiastic advocates of Washington’s supreme global power, its Top Cop role and penchant for manipulating and controlling world affairs by any means necessary.

For a few decades, most Americans supported this “leading” role for the U.S., particularly during the 45-year Cold War against the Soviet Union and the socialist world. But times have changed during the last two decades since the implosion of the USSR — and so has public opinion, though the news hasn’t reached Washington.

According to an extremely important new opinion poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, released Sept. 16, Americans favor a smaller global role for the United States. A statement accompanying release of the poll declared this the central finding in this survey of 2,600 Americas:

“The American people want to play an active part in world affairs but their internationalism is increasingly constrained by economic troubles at home and diminished influence overseas. In light of these constraints, Americans are reassessing their foreign policy priorities, scaling back their ambitions, and becoming more selective in how they want to engage with the world — by lightening America’s footprint overseas and directing scarce resources to tackling critical threats, such as international terrorism and nuclear proliferation.”

The poll further showed:

- “Nine out of 10 Americans today think it is more important for the future of the United States to fix pressing problems at home than to address challenges to the United States from abroad.... Only one-quarter of Americans think the United States plays a more important and powerful role as a world leader today compared to ten years ago, a sharp drop from 2002....
- “More than two-thirds of Americans think that as rising countries like Turkey and Brazil become more independent from the United States in the conduct of their foreign policy, it is mostly good because they will be less reliant on the United States....
- “A majority of Americans think that if Israel were to bomb Iran’s nuclear facilities, Iran were to retaliate against Israel, and the two were to go to war,

the United States should not bring its military forces into the war on the side of Israel and against Iran.”

In actual practice, Washington’s global leadership has invariably meant domination — soft and occasionally rewarding domination toward America’s allies, hard and often violent domination toward its numerous “enemies” of the day.

The Obama administration’s foreign policy is firmly based on unilateral American global leadership, though festooned with empty gestures toward a distant possible multipolarity. It was one of the reasons the U.S. foreign policy establishment favored the election of Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election. The reckless warmaking and imperial pretensions of the preceding neoconservative Bush Administration had weakened the structure of American hegemony, domination and world leadership.

As a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, Sen. Obama assiduously courted the Council on Foreign Relations and the rest of the foreign policy elite that has guided various administrations for several decades. In a major article appearing in *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2007) Obama emphasized American global leadership 22 times.

In a speech at the State Department days after he took office in January 2009, the new president declared: “Let there be no doubt about America’s commitment to lead. We can no longer afford drift, and we can no longer afford delay, nor can we cede ground to those who seek destruction. A new era of American leadership is at hand, and the hard work has just begun.”

Secretary of State Clinton is likewise preoccupied with the task of retaining U.S. global supremacy despite America’s declining political and economic fortunes and the growth to international prominence of such countries as China, India, Brazil, Russia, and the European Union. In a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington Sept. 8, Clinton mentioned American leadership 15 times, declaring:

“I know that these are difficult days for many Americans. But difficulties and adversities have never defeated or deflated this country. Throughout our history, through hot wars and cold, through economic struggles and the long march to a more perfect union, Americans have always risen to the challenges we have faced....

“And now, after years of war and uncertainty, people are wondering what the future holds at home and abroad. So let me say it clearly: the United States can, must and will lead in this new century. Indeed, the complexities and connections of today’s world have yielded a new American moment, a moment when our global leadership is essential, even if we must often lead in new ways, a moment... that must be seized through hard work and bold decisions, to lay the foundations for lasting American leadership for decades to come.... For the United States, global leadership is both a responsibility and an unparalleled opportunity.”

By rights the “new American moment” cannot last long because the days of unipolar leadership are ending. A number of countries are waiting in the wings to share multipolar leadership as equals with the U.S. in order to build a more equitable and hopefully more peaceful world.

There is only one way for that American moment of continued world dominion to last many decades longer. That is through the actual use of Washington's overwhelmingly dominant military power on an enormous scale — not that such a thought would ever cross Washington's mind.

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