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America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy

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BOOK REVIEWS

ACTIONS MATTER—WORDS ARE OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE

Daalder, Ivo H., and James M. Lindsay. *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*. Brookings Institution Press, 2003. 200pp. \$22.95

Three years of George W. Bush's presidency have dramatically altered the world's geopolitical stage. Following the tragic events of 9/11, American military power was used to topple the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. At the same time, the United States has irked some of its long-standing allies through its use of force, blunt political statements, and rejection of international agreements such as the ABM Treaty, the Kyoto Protocol (on global warming), and the International Criminal Court.

Discerning a coherent foreign policy framework guiding these actions has been difficult. The most authoritative source has been the national security strategy of 20 September 2002, and most of the president's advisers have published articles in the leading foreign policy journals and newspapers. These writings, however, present contrasting views, leaving some with the impression of a president who is attempting to balance several disparate policies.

Enter *America Unbound* by Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay. Exhaustively documented, with 477 footnotes squeezed

into two hundred pages, this book, by two Clinton administration National Security Council staffers, is a readable, balanced, and concise work that explains the present administration's theory behind the practice. These two authors, who know as much about how foreign policy is translated into action as anyone, have accomplished an empirical analysis of the actions and statements of President Bush and his advisers, discovering and articulating the worldviews behind their decisions. Along the way they also debunk some commonly held beliefs.

Daalder and Lindsay deliberately focus their analysis on President Bush. They claim that rather than his being manipulated by his advisers, Bush is the key decision maker when it comes to foreign policy, basing his actions on his deep personal convictions and a coherent worldview that:

- An America unconstrained (unbound) by alliances, traditions, and friendships is safer
- American power should be used for America's, and hence the world's, benefit

- No strategic peer competitor should be allowed
- America is best safeguarded by preemptive strikes against threatening states.

Using statements made by Bush while a presidential candidate, the authors show that his worldview has not only been consistent since he was appointed to the office but was reinforced by 9/11. The events of that day provided Bush with the means to execute his revolutionary foreign policy.

Daalder and Lindsay show that Bush is guided by a few corollaries. One is that states matter—the best way to attack terrorism, and terrorist groups, is to attack the states that harbor them. Another is that actions matter—what one says is of little consequence. A third is that if the United States leads, others will follow.

We are introduced to new labels, or more precisely, to people referred to as “neocons,” whom the authors describe as democratic imperialists. This group, which includes presidential advisers Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, and William Kristol, argues that the United States should use its overwhelming force to remake the world in its own image, embracing nation building and the spread of democracy.

Alternatively, Daalder and Lindsay label George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Condoleezza Rice as “assertive nationalists,” who also believe that the United States should use its overwhelming power to rid the world of all the bad people, although they do not support attempts to remake the world in America’s image. Both groups, however, share a deep skepticism of Wilsonian international law and the

institutions and treaties by which it was propagated. This has enforced an alliance between them that encourages the use of American military power, though the groups remain divided on their ultimate objectives.

Unbound America is, ultimately, a criticism of President Bush’s policies, his foreign policy unilateralism in particular. The last chapter asserts that “the fundamental premise of the Bush revolution, that America’s security rested on an America unbound, was profoundly mistaken.” The authors base their case not so much on growing anti-American sentiment throughout the world as on the position that the complex foreign policy goals now confronting America cannot be solved with a “go it alone” policy.

Daalder and Lindsay’s assertion comes early in the “revolution.” Saddam Hussein is in U.S. custody; Afghanistan is adopting a constitution; Libya’s Mohammar Qaddafi is agreeing to give up his weapons of mass destruction programs; Iran is agreeing with European diplomats to a nuclear nonproliferation treaty protocol; Saudi Arabia has announced its first-ever elections; dialogue is being renewed among Syria, Israel, and the PLO; and finally, China has engaged itself to help solve the issue of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. It remains to be seen whether President Bush will be proven correct in his belief that strong-armed leadership will result in a strong following and make the world safer.

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