

International Organizations and Security Issues: An American Perspective

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This memo outlines the perspectives of US foreign policy practitioners concerning the role of international organizations in managing security issues. The memo is based on contemporary literature, numerous interviews with current and former US foreign policy practitioners, and the views of the author, a former practitioner. The author argues that an instrumental perspective of international organizations prevails among practitioners regardless of the party-affiliation of the Administration. He concludes by proposing a methodology that can be used to understand and predict US participation within international organizations on security matters.

Around the world over the last few years much has been argued and written concerning the Bush Administration's foreign policy. The discussions and dissection of the worldview of key Administration officials has been most interesting. Daalder and Lindsay in their book *America Unbound* and Boot in a recent article in *Foreign Policy* provide useful frameworks for viewing the foreign policy worldviews in the top tiers of the Bush Administration. The two approaches are conflated for the purposes of this article and depicted in table 1.

This typology identifies the oft-condemned neo-conservatives as democratic imperialists. The first group tends to advocate for aggressive US action in support of US values abroad – freedom, pluralism, human rights, and market economics. The term imperialists is used to evoke the sense that the group hopes to remake the world in the image of the US so that all peoples may experience the dignity, liberty and prosperity offered through US values. In this view, as the world is transformed, threats to the US are reduced. The second group is not much interested in changing the world per se – unless it threatens the security interests of the United States. These are the assertive nationalists or traditional national-interest conservatives. They are ready to use power to defeat threats to US security interests. Both the assertive nationalist and the democratic imperialists see US power best used when it is unconstrained by the slowness and dilution of the collective decision-making process in IOs. This view forms the primary difference between the assertive nationalists and the third and currently smallest group, the pragmatic internationalists. Like the assertive nationalists this group is primarily interested in protecting America's security interests; however, the internationalists have a greater appreciation of the costs of alienating other countries through the unconstrained use of power. These individuals prefer to channel US

power through international institutions or organizations whenever possible. They believe the US can nearly always attain its desired goals through the international institutions. They acknowledge consensus building requires time, may be tedious, and may entail some fine-tuning of US objectives. But, they see these minor compromises as an acceptable cost of doing business.

Table 1: Foreign Policy Worldview of Key Bush Administration Officials

<p>Democratic Imperialists or Neo-Conservatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unconstrained US power to change world so it no longer threatens US. <p>Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith, Undersecretary of Defense Lewis Libby, Chief of Staff to the Vice President</p>
<p>Assertive Nationalists or National Interest Conservatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unconstrained US power to defeat security threats. <p>Dick Cheney, Vice President Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor</p>
<p>Pragmatic Internationalists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ US power through international institutions to defeat security threats. <p>Colin Powell, Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State</p>

Unfortunately, the worldview analysis is not particularly useful for analyzing when or how the US will choose to manage security issues within IOs. At best the analysis would come down to assertions about which camp won particular foreign policy arguments. For example, the Bush Administration sought and obtained UN Security Council authority for its war against the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Further, it allowed significant UN involvement in the Bonn political process to form the political future of the state. Under worldview analysis, these instances of managing security issues through the UN would be chalked up as a bureaucratic victory of the pragmatic internationalists over the other two camps. Indeed, if the Bush Administration were less diverse in worldview, this type of analysis would have no legs, as it would not be able to describe outcomes that fall beyond the officials' perspectives. As discussed below, these policy decision are actually more the result of a pervasive instrumental view of IOs prevalent among foreign policy practioners.

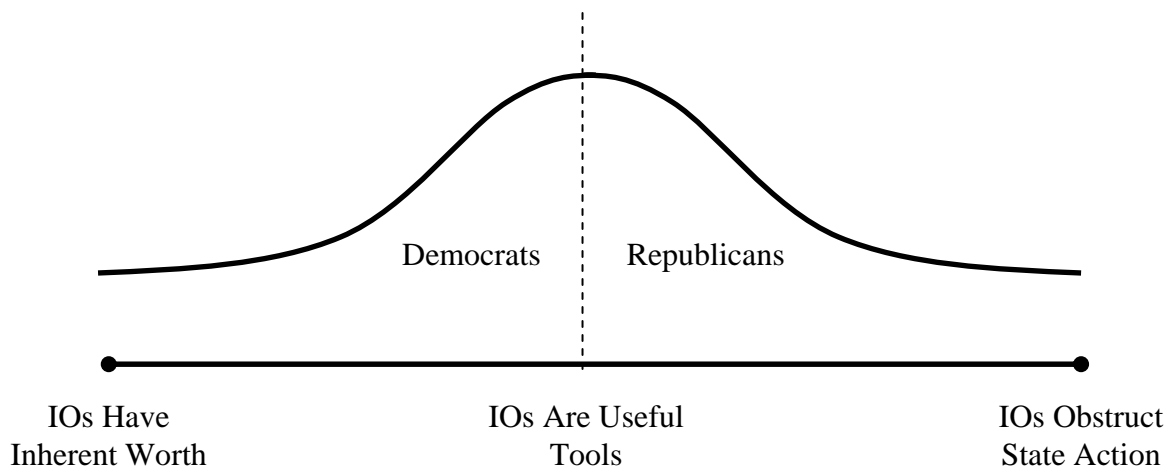
The American Perspective of International Organizations

The American foreign policy elite maintains a wide spectrum of beliefs concerning IOs. Figure 1 depicts a simple spectrum that can be used to label these beliefs. The two poles of this spectrum are: 1) IOs have inherent normative worth and promote values that benefit the US; and at the other pole, 2) IOs dilute American sovereignty and objectives and hinder US freedom of

action. In the center is the view that IOs can be useful tools for the US to use in pursuit of its objectives. This middle ground is the instrumentalist perspective.

The two US political parties tend to split the spectrum in half: Democrats occupy the space from the left pole to the center and Republicans from the center to the right pole. While difficult to prove, it seems that the elites are normally distributed along this spectrum as depicted in the figure. Given this distribution, US administrations will tend to be filled with people who view institutions as a tool – this is a selection effect. However, there will be outliers on the right extreme in the case of a Republican administration and on the left extreme for a Democratic administration. The current Administration, for example, could be charted onto this figure. Colin Powell and the other pragmatic internationalists would be near the center and Vice President Cheney and similar-minded individuals would be in the right extreme. The democratic imperialists would generally reside between Cheney and Powell.

Figure 1: US Elites' View of International Organizations



This figure represents elites, the broad group of Americans who are interested in foreign policy and actively involved in the public debate on these matters. Hence, in this context elites includes et. al. members of the Executive and Legislature that work on foreign policy as well as foreign policy analysts in academia, think tanks, or NGOs, journalists, and interested, involved private citizens. As a result, the figure hides an important insight identified through interviews that reinforces the tendency toward the center caused by the selection effect. The subset of elites that actually conducts foreign policy in the Executive Branch, termed practioners, is much more likely to ascribe to the instrumental perspective, or behave as if they do, than are the elites that do not have to implement foreign policy. There is something about the pressure of developing and implementing the country's foreign policy that pushes the practioners towards the center of the spectrum. Elites in the Congress or those outside of government have much greater freedom to retain and argue their original perspective.

The centering phenomenon practioners endure seems to have many causes. Discussions with career civil service and foreign service officers indicate that, in general, strong opinions for or against IOs (the extremes in our figure) tend to dissipate as tenure lengthens. This seemed to

be more the case for persons who started out in the left extreme and gradually adjusted their views toward the center. This movement from the left toward the center is best understood as a form of disillusionment. Over time these people began to come to the opinion that international institutions cannot achieve all that is hoped or constrain all bad international behavior. There seems to be fewer professional practitioners that start out on the right extreme than the left. The movement of these conservatives toward the center is more of a concession to the strong normative pull of the left and center to manage security issues within the IOs. They reluctantly accept that working through the IOs – with all the arcane hoops to jump through – is seen as normal and correct. Further, these conservatives appear to select positions within the bureaucracy that distance themselves from having to deal with the institutions.

Besides the professional bureaucrats, the practitioners group is composed of the political appointees of a particular administration. These are the senior officials whose opinions and preferences have great effect on the policy outcomes. The political appointees face the same pressures toward the center. More importantly, once in office the desire to be seen as successful becomes intense to the degree that it can override a strong predisposition on either extreme. In effect, political appointees adopt a problem solving worldview—almost any solution is acceptable if it will accomplish the desired US goal. The modality of the success is of little importance. This phenomenon is hugely important for understanding US behavior in IOs. The actual behavior of the US in IOs shows that pragmatism rules over the ideologies of either the left or right. Examples abound. During the Clinton Administration, Secretary of State and former outspoken US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright became a strong advocate for war against Serbia during the Kosovo situation even though it was clear that the UN Security Council would not authorize such action. This behavior is contrary to her long-standing position in the extreme left of figure 1. Her allegiance to a particular worldview on IOs took a secondary position to the need to accomplish an important task. Milosevic was a problem that had to be solved and the Administration, with Albright in a leading role, found a way to accomplish the US goal even though it required going to war with no Security Council endorsement.

There are other pressures against the two poles of the figure that also drive US behavior more towards the instrumental position. At the right pole, foreign policy behavior gets criticism and push back from the American public because they do not prefer its decidedly aggressive and perceived unilateral posture. Polls routinely demonstrate the American public wants its leaders to get other countries to endorse US goals. This is based on at least two points of view. First, Americans don't want to be responsible for managing the whole international system by themselves. Americans say they "don't want to be the world's policeman." Secondly, Americans don't like it when the liberal democracies of Europe criticize US foreign policy. The exception is France. Americans have come to expect that France will offer contrary views out of some sort of rivalry with the US. As a consequence, French opposition to US policies bothers the American public less than it would otherwise. The sentiment is, "The French are being the French, why should I be concerned?" Beyond France, European dissent tends to raise Americans' concerns. Consequently, US practitioners must address this opposition. This poses a dilemma for practitioners since European countries in particular appear to be much more inclined philosophically toward the left pole of the spectrum on IOs and against the use of force than Americans.

The American public is not much bothered if the governments of countries outside Europe oppose US policies even if those states are liberal democracies. This Euro centric bias is not commendable, and may not endure, but it is real today and influences American foreign policy.

There are also forces from the international system. Other countries tend to push back against the right pole but not the left pole. This may be because elites in other countries have a narrower spectrum of beliefs concerning the role of IOs. In America given its situation of massive power in the political, economic and military areas relative to all other states, it is more realistic for elites to believe that there is a viable option of practicing foreign policy at the right extreme without regard for international institutions. Most countries do not have sufficient wherewithal to have this option and must operate within the IOs to achieve their goals. If the US fails to achieve its goals in the UN, it proved in both Kosovo and Iraq that it can find another way to achieve its objectives.

The structure of the American Government also serves to preserve the breadth of options available to a US President. The strength of the American Presidency and the long-standing practice of granting deference to the Executive on foreign affairs are at work here. The American public has not demanded and the Congress has not legislated away the Executive's freedom of action. The US has no laws that require the use of IOs or push the Administration in that direction. In fact, the US has some laws and legislative requirements that make it more cumbersome to operate within a UN context than otherwise. On the contrary, some other countries have laws or practices that require the Executive to operate within or under the authority of the UN on certain security matters. Such self-imposed constraints don't exist in the US.

Recent American Behavior

This assessment of the US is not specific to the current Bush Administration or the post-9/11 world. The American Government has acted with an instrumentalist perspective at least since the Somalia debacle in late 1993. The Clinton Administration did seem to enter office in January 1993 with a strongly pro-institutionalist perspective. Madeleine Albright famously coined the policy and term "assertive multilateralism." However, this perspective was short lived. The deaths of US servicemen in Somalia later that year and the manner in which the issue (unfairly) reverberated through the US political process changed the substance of the Administration's policy, if not the style. Even though the failures in Somalia were more American than they were UN, one of the lessons the Clinton Administration took from the political maelstrom following the episode was that security issues could not be outsourced to IOs. The worsening situation in the Balkans that the US had purposefully left to the UN and Europeans for resolution contributed to this as well. The Administration lost confidence that the UN in particular could accomplish aggressive conflict management activities. Further, the Administration came to believe that an institutionalist foreign policy did not earn much political capital among centrist Americans and was actively derided by the opposition party. The policy solution developed in response to this was twofold: 1) a half-hearted effort to reform and strengthen the institutions; and 2) invigorating American interactions with the UN Secretariat to

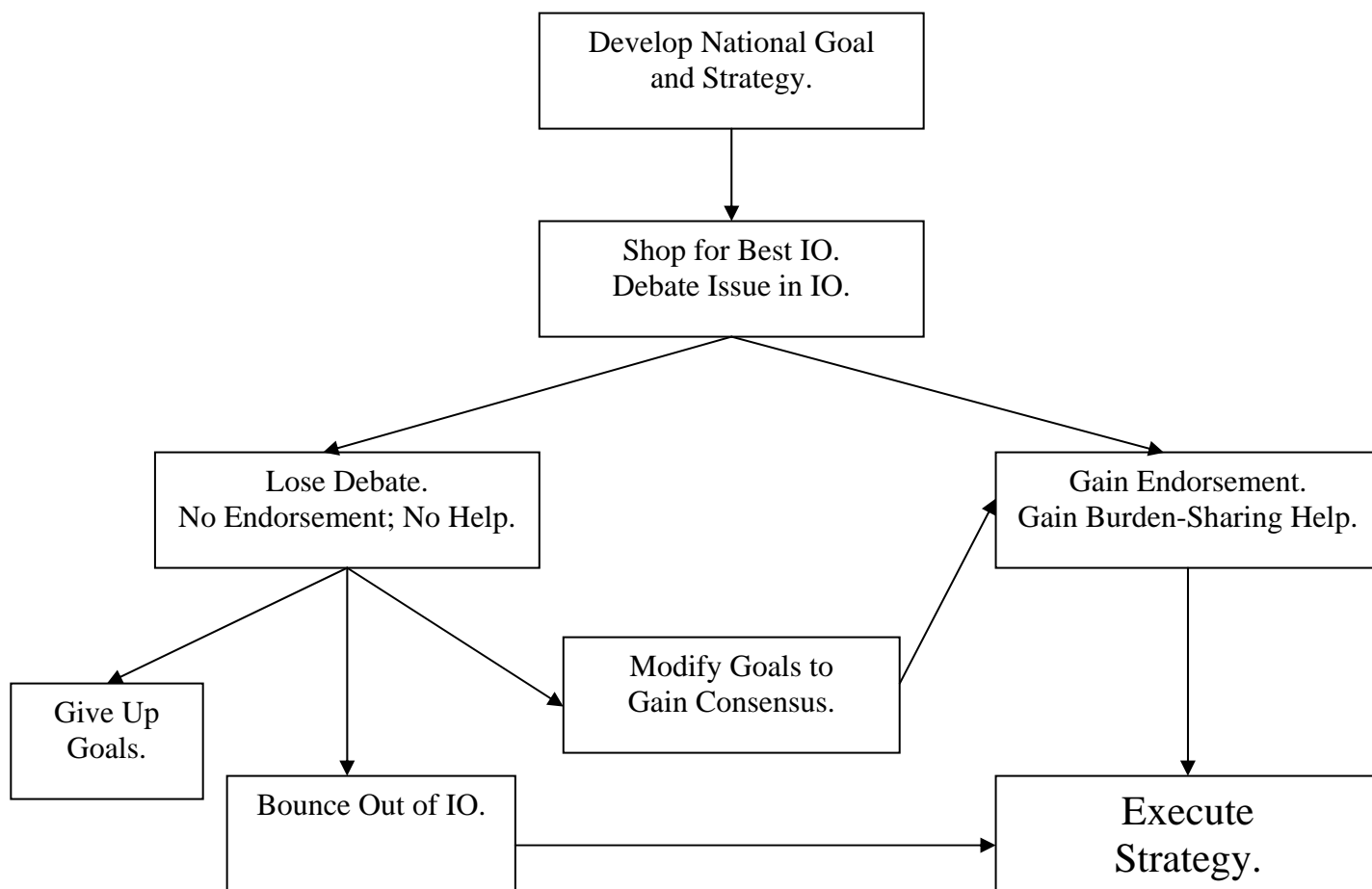
ensure active management by the US of US security issues using the UN as its tool or instrument. The remainder of Clinton's Presidency treated the IOs as US instruments. The Administration was adamant to avoid paying the political price it perceived resulted from its earlier institutionalist posture.

Clinton's instrumentalism did not raise hackles at home and abroad largely because the Administration did not attempt the type of bold actions that were widely opposed by the liberal democracies of Europe. Only the matter of Kosovo seemed to be on the edge. And this situation was opposed primarily by illiberal regimes, which were easier for the Americans to discredit among its traditional allies and at home.

The Bush election campaign derided Clinton's foreign policy as undisciplined and over-extended. Consequently, when Bush took office he instituted a steady effort to pull-back US engagement with the world on issues that were not seen as primary US concerns, namely those issues that did not seem connected to traditional balance of power issues among the world's powers. The Administration was able to effectively withdraw or reduce US involvement with a number of international agreements. On military matters, the Administration was able to engineer a small reduction in the overall size of the NATO presence in the Balkans and bring some US service members home. They also ceased or dramatically reduced US diplomacy in several conflict resolution efforts, although this turned out to be short-lived.

Eight months into Bush's term of office, 9/11 changed the priorities of the American people and the Administration. The Bush Administration after 9/11 came to believe that bold and aggressive action was required to guarantee the security of America. On international terrorism it advocated states go after terrorist groups as never before. The Bush team took its issue to the UN. The UN Security Council agreed with the American position and unanimously passed a Chapter VII resolution mandating all UN member states to undertake a series of strong actions against terrorist groups – actions that were unprecedented for most states. On al Qaeda and the Taliban the Administration again took the issue to the UN, obtained the desired endorsement, and led an ad hoc coalition against the Government of Afghanistan. It would face a more difficult audience concerning Iraq. However, its behavior was largely the same, to a point. The Administration developed its goal and desired strategy largely within an American vacuum. Since it very much wanted a Security Council endorsement, it addressed the issue repeatedly within the Council and in capitols expending much political capital in the process. Upon realizing that it could not achieve its results inside the institution, the Administration faced a decision – to modify its goals so as to attain a Security Council consensus or to bounce out of the institution and prosecute its desired goal in the absence of the endorsement. Figure 2 depicts the US decision process. A similar process is used for nearly all US decisions on the use of force.

Figure 2: US Decision Process



Why did the international community fail to achieve a consensus on whether to use force against Iraq? Why did the Bush Administration refuse to modify its goals in order to achieve a consensus? The answer is complicated, but can be seen in a simple construction. The US placed greater urgency and importance on disarming Iraq. Rightly or wrongly after 9/11 disarming Iraq by removing Saddam Hussein became a primary focus of the Bush Administration (and the Blair Government in the UK). No other countries appeared to share this same urgency or sense of threat from Hussein. The US had little flexibility in its desired outcome. The US believed the only way to ensure Iraq's compliance with disarmament was by regime change. Any disarmament program that entailed actions short of regime change appeared unacceptable to the US. The US did not perceive common cause among UN Security Council members. The Bush Administration placed great importance on a black and white litmus test either states were "for us, or against us." Some US leaders perceived the caution expressed by many states during Security Council debates as tantamount to aiding and abetting terrorists. The Bush Administration's sense that there was no common cause among Security Council members with

its goal reduced further the Administration's willingness to be flexible. They felt they were unlikely to ever obtain an acceptable outcome within the Council. Finally, the US did not believe much burden sharing was necessary to achieve its goal so it needn't give up much of its political objective to purchase unneeded assistance. At this moment in history, the US was unprepared to make concessions on what its leaders believed was an issue of vital interest.

A separate issue regarding IOs and the Bush Administration is sometimes misunderstood and used as evidence to argue that the current Administration does not intend to operate within IOs – a challenge to my argument that regardless of what Administration officials believe, they act as instrumentalists. The issue is the distinct difference between the Clinton Administration and the Bush Administration concerning the best approach to post-conflict peacekeeping or state building activities. Since these operations are almost always conducted by the IOs, the Bush approach has been taken to equate to an anti-IO unilateralism. The Clinton approach could be described as a “full-court press” model in which engagement with all aspects of a broken country's institutions is attempted in order to resuscitate the state. Such an approach requires substantial peacekeepers and international police to maintain basic security while the civilian arms of the intervention conduct their work. This was essentially the best practice that grew out of the efforts in the 1990s. The Bush Administration rejected this model in favor of what could be termed a self-help approach. In this approach, the interveners replace bad indigenous leaders with good leaders and provide them with the basic tool of sovereignty – an army. The interveners are kept from attempting many state building tasks because of a belief that state building must be done by the indigenous actors to be of any lasting value. This approach can be seen in US actions in Afghanistan and its desired actions in Iraq. In the latter case, it was unable to put its desired “good” leader in place because the Iraqis did not respond as the Administration had predicted. Interestingly, over time the Bush Administration has gradually adopted a strategy in both Afghanistan and Iraq that is more and more looking like the full-court press model.

A Methodology for American Behavior

The instrumental posture described in this memo in no way implies that US practitioners believe the UN and other IOs are irrelevant to international affairs. President Bush's goading in this regard in March 2003 was simply goading in an effort to stimulate support for the American position on Iraq. The default position within the US will continue to be to take its security issues to the UN or regional IOs as a first resort in order to get other countries to sign onto the US objectives and proposed solution. There is a hierarchy of institutions that guide the US practitioners. On use of force issues US practitioners will go first to the UN given its clear preeminence on security issues over the other IOs. On matters short of the use of force US practitioners will shop among the other IOs to find the one that is best suited for the particular situation and most likely to grant the US its preferred endorsement.

The norm of taking security matters to IOs continues to have resonance in the US. US wishes are blocked so infrequently that the norm is not eroded; generally, the UN system and other IOs “work” quite well for the US. At a minimum the US will almost certainly introduce its grievances in an institution and try for an endorsement. If the past is any example, usually it will attain the endorsement because of commonality of views on the matter and the US's ability to be

very persuasive. In those situations when the administration knows there is disagreement among the members, it will manage its issue very carefully so as to avoid losing a vote on the use of force – it is better for the US to have an ambiguous endorsement than a clearly voted down endorsement. This was the case for both Iraq and Kosovo.

There are two situations in which the US is likely deviate from the default position of taking matters to the IOs. The first is when the circumstances require great urgency of action in which case the US would likely bring the matter to the relevant IO contemporaneously with its action. The other circumstance is when the preferred US solution to the problem requires extraordinary secrecy – for example, no country would ever bring its covert foreign actions before an IO. Fortunately, these two types of situations are rare in international affairs.

US practioners will continue to develop foreign policy goals and the preferred American solutions largely in a vacuum – the concerns and preferences of other countries will not factor highly into the development of US priorities. The US will remain self-centered. On issues that US practioners believe require bold, aggressive action there is likely to be strong political disagreement among states. These are the most difficult situations for the IOs to grapple with. The utility of the IOs depends ultimately on the type of goals sought and the level of agreement among the voting members for such goals. Hopefully, the IOs are also able to develop and reinforce norms that influence the types of goals sought by member states.

When the US is unable to develop a satisfactory strategy on its own to pursue a particular goal, it is more likely to be open to suggestions from others. The Bush Administration's response to the North Korean nuclear program is an example. The goal is clear – to reverse the program -- on this issue deemed vital to US national security. However, other than asking China to pressure the North to cease the program and a few other trial balloons (such as a proposed written security guarantee) there seems to be no well thought out strategy. In this situation the Administration appears to be buying time through a multilateral process until someone comes up with a viable plan. In moments like this, other countries or the IOs themselves can have substantial influence on US decisions. US practioners are looking for any road that will lead to success.

When the goals of other countries come up on the agenda within IOs the US will assess the particular matter based on how it affects US goals and priorities. If it is helpful to US concerns the US will endorse and promote the issue; if deemed hurtful to US goals, the US will seek to quash the matter or somehow transform it into a helpful direction. On many issues the US will be ambivalent. In these situations, the US will seek to earn inexpensive political chits from other countries and the American public. An example would be whether to support a peacekeeping force in a country that has little strategic or political value to the US. As long as the operation seems doable or has a reasonable chance to not be a catastrophe, the US would be likely to support it. However, the US would seek to minimize any burden sharing required of the US (such as mandatory dues to pay for the operation).

A simple series of questions serve as a useful methodology for predicting US behavior within the IOs. Does the US know what it wants to do and how it wants to do it? How urgent and important is the US goal? Does the US have much flexibility on the goal or strategy? Does

the US perceive need for burden sharing? Does the US feel it is alone on the issue or is there a sense of trust and common cause among key states?

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion leads one to a simple conclusion regarding US behavior within IOs on security matters -- unless the US makes a dramatic shift from its pattern of the last ten years, it is likely to remain an instrumental actor within IOs. The US will use the institutions when the US can accomplish its national goals through these venues; if it cannot find success in the IOs it may bounce out and pursue the particular policy through other means. Since there is such international and domestic pressure against bouncing out, this is likely in only the most extreme cases when the particular policy is deemed important enough to pay the political price of operating outside the institutions. The key to helping keep the US within the institution on a particular issue is to remember that US practitioners chase success. If IOs or the state-to-state interactions that occur in their midst can develop broadly accepted creative pathways towards the US notion of success they will find the US stampeding down that route.

It must be recognized that many member states of the IOs behave as instrumentalists. As described previously, the primary difference between most states and the US is that the US has a more viable option than any other state to opt out and pursue its objectives beyond the strictures of the institution. As a result, one confounding frustration for many states is the fact that the IOs appear to be of little use in controlling the exercise of US power. On this point, I would argue that the IOs do, in fact, have a strong influence on US behavior. The practice of going to the IOs is engrained on the US system. Even Administrations such as President Bush's with their predisposition against IOs behave as if the IOs matter.

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The author formerly served on the US National Security Council staff and in the Office of the US Secretary of Defense during the Clinton and Bush Administrations. He is currently a Researcher at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at the Stanford Institute for International Studies.

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