

## The Lure of Simplicity

MACKENZIE S. P. COLELLA

*Virginia Military Institute*

Throughout history, freedom has been threatened by war and terror; it has been challenged by the clashing wills of powerful states and the evil designs of tyrants; and it has been tested by widespread poverty and disease. Today, humanity holds in its hands the opportunity to further freedom's triumph over all these foes. The United States welcomes our responsibility to lead in this great mission (*NSS*, Transmittal Letter).

So closes the introduction to the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States*, a document that ushered in a revolutionary era of American foreign policy. Not since Paul Nitze's NSC 68 has one document so profoundly affected America's role in the international system. Signaling the end of containment's reign as the centerpiece of American strategy, the *NSS* explained that the nation could no longer tolerate tyranny and despotism in the world; instead the United States must now actively use its hegemonic power to bring freedom and democracy to the world's oppressed. Only in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points can one find a calling equal in grandness and moral purpose in the history of American foreign policy. The 2002 *NSS* launched the United States on a hazardous adventure to reshape the world, an adventure that would lead to Iraq.

Key to understanding this shift is the role of Condoleezza Rice, President George W. Bush's National Security Advisor. Until 2002, Rice possessed a deeply entrenched worldview, known as realism, that denounced foreign policy driven by morality. Heavily influenced by Rice, Bush in his 2000 presidential campaign advocated a realist foreign policy that rejected humanitarian intervention and focused on great power balance. In the words of Rice, the fundamental objective of American foreign policy was "promoting the national interest," and this goal discarded the notion that the United States could transform the world (Rice, "National Interest," 45). Why then, fewer than two years later, did Rice commission and approve a document that heralded a dramatic shift and began a chain of events that culminated in a preemptive war to liberate a nation from a cruel dictator and change the face of the Middle East?

This paper's first section, "Dynamic Documents," seeks to place the *NSS* in an historical context by comparing it with another influential document that was conceived under similar highly dangerous circumstances. "A Grand Strategy of

Transformation” describes the ambitious strategy proposed by the *NSS*, focusing on its break with traditional U.S. foreign policy since 1945. The argument then moves to analyses of Rice’s intellectual outlook and her own shift following the 9/11 attacks in the sections titled “Rice the Realist” and “Rice’s Shift.” What follows is an explanation for Rice’s change, beginning with “The Catalytic Event” which focuses on the important role played by the 9/11 attacks in exposing the many problems of applying a realist framework to the post Cold War world. “Relationship with the President” and “The Neoconservative Answer” describe the two influences that led Rice to the dramatically new framework she applied to the *NSS*. “The Consequences of Simplicity” concludes by describing the consequences of implementing the new strategy she proposes in the *NSS*. This paper provides a fresh analysis of a momentous time in the history of American foreign relations, a time when an important and powerful individual reconsidered her established conceptions of international politics and helped to dramatically change America’s perceived role in the world.

**Dynamic Documents.** The position that the United States found itself in the months following the 9/11 attacks was not as unique as it may seem at first glance. Little more than five decades before, the United States had found itself the victor after a desperate struggle against German and Japanese tyranny. Too quickly, however, communist victories in China, Czechoslovakia and Austria suggested the existence of a new threat: a unified communist bloc bent on spreading Marxist-Leninist ideology. The massive buildup of Soviet conventional forces and Moscow’s successful test of an atomic bomb very soon cast an ominous pallor on the recent peace. In light of these discouraging events, George F. Kennan’s established strategy of limited containment embodied in the chiefly economic Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan seemed an inadequate alternative to those who foresaw a more dangerous Soviet foreign policy. One such individual was Paul Nitze. In the early winter months of 1950 Nitze headed a group of government experts who had the mission of reexamining “objectives in peace and war and of the effect of these objectives on [American] strategic plans.” (NSC 68, 24). The resulting document, NSC 68, featured a dramatic shift in U.S. Cold War strategy. According to Nitze, the Second World War had left the United States as the dominant nation in the free world. This meant that United States must “organize and enlist the energies and resources of the free world in a positive program which will frustrate the Kremlin design for world domination by creating a situation in the free world to which the Kremlin will be compelled to adjust” (79). Only in this way the United States could serve as a beacon of “freedom and justice” (80).

Nitze’s call to action and the ideologically-driven worldview of NSC 68 arguably influenced American strategy throughout the remainder of the Cold War. Robert Blackwill, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Soviet Affairs and Rice’s boss during the George H. W. Bush administration, has summarized the lasting significance of NSC 68 this way: “Many ideas in this remarkable document

have sent their echoes loudly and persistently into U.S. Administrations through the decades” (May, 121). Rice herself stated that NSC 68 gave “America a vision that was transformative and that was realized 50 years later” (Rice, “Remarks on Foreign Policy”).

Following 9/11, much like in 1950, Americans found themselves at another crossroads. The triumph over communism, as had the triumph over fascism, brought difficult questions. What should be the role of the U.S. in a world without any clear, immediate and moral threat? Many, including the Clinton administration, felt that “the movement toward democracy and capitalism was irreversible” (Gaddis, 76). All that was required, then, was to simply encourage and aid this process. The 9/11 attacks, much like the string of Communist successes in the late 1940’s, shattered this complacency. The 2002 *NSS* thus served, like NSC 68, as a call to arms. It was not enough to maintain the status quo and trust the forces of history to slowly move the world towards freedom and peace on its own. History needed help. Assuming the universal validity of American liberty, the *NSS* argued that for America to live in peace it must not only defend itself, but also extend to the world the same principles that have allowed Americans to prosper. Holdouts of tyranny posed a direct threat to the peace, and must be challenged. The *NSS*, like NSC 68, is a dynamic document written at a crucial moment, and both sought to influence American foreign policy makers, one way or another, for decades to come. Both strategies forced the world to choose sides. Both made clear calls to action which transformed foreign policy in a way that will not be easily retracted.

**A Grand Strategy of Transformation.** The 2002 *NSS* proceeds from the premise that containment worked. The Soviet Union, unable to develop and cut off from the rest of the world, died on the vine and with its demise went the only powerful alternative to American political and economic values. The United States thereby found itself in a unique “position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence” (*NSS*, 3). The threat of great power war had been neutralized. Indeed, the great powers, according to the *NSS*, shared the same interests: “Today, the world’s great powers find ourselves on the same side—united by common dangers of terrorist violence and chaos” (4). This political-power reality seemed to magnify, not reduce U.S. power. Yet the world would not prove to be safe. America was threatened not by a single nation or band of nations with great armies, but by small amorphous organizations that, using modern technology, were capable of great destruction at a tiny cost (3). These groups are not easily deterred, as death is often a means to their end. Preemption, the *NSS* concludes, is therefore an essential facet in dealing with such threats (6).

In addition to fighting and even attacking preemptively terrorists and the states that support them, the *NSS* introduced a truly grand strategy. America’s hegemony combined with agreement between the great powers provided the United States with an historic opportunity to address the root problems that cause

terrorism, “frustrations growing out of the absence of representative institutions within their own societies, so that the only outlet for dissent was religious fanaticism” (Gaddis, 89).

The idea that the United States could fight terror, and at the same time promote democracy, provided clarity of moral purpose. Liberty and justice were universal principles not reserved only for the West: “No people on earth yearn to be oppressed, aspire to servitude, or eagerly await the midnight knock of the secret police” (*NSS*, 9). The *NSS* calls on America to “extend the benefits of freedom across the globe.” (Transmittal Letter). Here lies the great shift in American foreign policy. For over half a century Soviet power had prevented America from actively seeking to modify the Soviet system; the United States instead had sought to refine and protect its own the institutions that made it a “model republic,” to contain Soviet expansion, and to expect the people of the Soviet Union to change from within. Now, with no power to counter America, and with the perceived unity of the great powers, the *NSS* assigned the United States a new mission: the creation of the world in its own image, and the active placement of the world on the path to freedom.

**Rice the Realist.** The ideas espoused in the *NSS* directly counter a long entrenched realist outlook on international relations. The Realist School diametrically opposes the morality based, transformational strategy proposed by the *NSS*. Ironically, it was an established realist who was the main actor in the development of the *NSS*: Condoleezza Rice. The ideological change she underwent in 2001 and 2002 provides an instructive perspective on the revolution in American foreign policy that occurred with the introduction of her document.

Prior to September 11, 2001, few would take issue with the description of Condoleezza Rice as a realist. Defined best by its most famous modern proponent and thinker, Hans Morgenthau, Realism asserts that “the Statesman must think in terms of national interest, conceived as power among other powers.” Framing foreign policy on the “national interest” was the only moral way to act in an anarchical international system. According to Morgenthau “the national interest of a peace-loving nation can only be defined in terms of national security, and national security must be defined as integrity of the national territory and of its institutions” (Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 440). It mattered not what the domestic state of affairs in a state were; policy should focus on reaping the benefits or preventing the harm that that state posed. The only way to accomplish this result was to gain power, specifically military power, to gain concessions and deter attack. For Morgenthau, not shaping foreign policy on the basis of the national interest was immoral because it did not best serve the nation’s people. Morgenthau’s fundamental rule of diplomacy stated that “Diplomacy must be diverged of the crusading spirit” (439). The idea that one nation’s values were applicable to and should be forced on all, nationalistic universalism, was the fatal flaw in the

international system, as Morgenthau saw it (195-196). This rejection of moralism in foreign policy, clearly evident in Rice's writings and actions prior to 2002, is vital in understanding the magnitude of the shift that led her to champion the 2002 NSS.

Born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1954 in the epicenter of the Civil Rights movement, Condoleezza Rice's middle-class status as the daughter of a Presbyterian minister gave her some shelter from the city's racial strife. While dealing with the obligatory segregation she learned French and competed successfully in figure-skating and piano. She also excelled academically, and entered the University of Denver at the age of 15. While studying international relations, Rice came to respect Hans Morgenthau along with other realists such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, and over time developed her own realist ideas. After earning her doctorate in international relations, she joined the heavily realist faculty at Stanford University to teach international relations theory (Mann, 148). A Stanford colleague, Michael McFaul, described her as a believer in "*realpolitik*, [that is] that the main driving force of international relations is balance of power politics and that what happens internally inside a country should not be a part of foreign policy" (147-148). She voted for Jimmy Carter in 1976, but later abandoned the Democrats after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, to which she felt Carter had reacted too meekly (148). Realist theory informed her that power must be confronted with power, and reluctance to do so would only result in national diminishment. Despite her new Republican affiliation, she still naturally rejected, at least at the time, Reagan's moralistic approach to the Soviet Union. Statements representing the United States as the "beacon of democracy" embarrassed her (148).

Rice's career turned from academics to policy making when Brent Scowcroft, an avowed realist and protégé of Kissinger, noticed her (Goldberg, 59). Scowcroft met Rice at an arms control conference where she impressed him with her realism and disdain for ideological motives in foreign policy (Heilbrunn, "Rice," 49). When Scowcroft became National Security Advisor in the George H. W. Bush White House, he quickly offered Rice a position as an advisor on policies relating to Eastern Europe. The two worked together closely and Scowcroft's realism clearly influenced her. Rice was sometimes described as his "protégé" (Goldberg, 57). While serving in the White House Rice was present as the entire Cold War status quo came crashing down. To deal with these remarkable events, Rice and Scowcroft relied on the very Kissingerian solution of using incentives to guide the former Soviet Union into the Western international system (Heilbrunn, "Rice," 49).

During the interim between the two Bush administrations, Rice returned to Stanford as its provost (Kessler, 17). Her close relationship with the first Bush administration placed her in an influential position when George W. Bush decided to run for president. In August 1998, the two met at the Bush family compound in

Kennebunkport, Maine. Over several days the two became quite close, discussing not only foreign affairs, but also sports, in which both were avid enthusiasts (Mann, 250). Working with George W. Bush gave Rice a unique opportunity, as he was essentially a “blank slate” when it came to foreign policy (Heilbrunn, “Rice,” 49). One can readily see Rice’s realist influence in many of Bush’s statements on foreign policy during the campaign. (Mann, 256-257). These ideas meshed very well with Rice’s realism. For her part, Rice attacked Madeline Albright’s claim that America was the “indispensable nation” and should play an active role in the new international system dominated by infant democracies emerging from tyranny. “American arrogance of power can be self-defeating. Too heavy an American hand would cause more bad than good,” Rice asserted. “In talking with new democracies, it is sometimes important to admit that democratic development takes time.” Rice also emphasized the dangers to the international balance of power that such an “indispensable nation” outlook engendered. “If you are too promiscuous in the use of military power you will deprive the world of a balancer” (Heilbrunn, “Rice,” 49).

In January 2000, Rice published an important article in *Foreign Affairs* that revealed a potential Bush administration’s foreign policy. “Promoting the National Interest” emphasized realism in the genre of Hans Morgenthau. Her thesis was a clear rejection of the Wilsonian (and later Clintonian) principle that “the United States is exercising power legitimately only when it is doing so on behalf of someone or something else.” Rice acknowledged that policy guided purely by national interest may benefit others, but she characterized that consequence as a “second-order effect” (Rice, “National Interest,” 47). “Promoting the National Interest” emphasized building economic prosperity by encouraging global economic liberalization, strengthening alliances and rebuilding the military to enhance U.S. power, but rejected the use of the military “to build a civilian society” (53). Engagement in the Kosovo conflict was advocated, but only in the context that it would prevent larger destabilizing ethnic conflicts that would threaten our allies in the region, not because it might help avert a “humanitarian disaster” (52). Regarding China and Russia, American policy should encourage economic liberalization, not active involvement, as a means of eventually attaining political liberalization. Finally, addressing rogue regimes such as Iraq, North Korea and Iran, Rice argued that there “need be no sense of panic about them.” Even if they obtained weapons of mass destruction, the threat of “national obliteration” would deter their use (61). Rice concluded that in working within the balance of power “America can exercise power without arrogance and pursue its interests without hectoring and bluster” (62). The message was clear: only by working within the balance of power, and without trying to actively transform the world, could the United States promote an international climate that was congruent with its national interest.

Despite her well-documented realist views, Rice demonstrated even before 2001 that she was not immune to the moral tendencies that she intellectually decried. A self-described evangelical with a “very, very powerful faith in God” (Heilbrunn, “Rice,” 49), she began to flirt with moralism as she became more involved with the policymaking, rather than the academic, side of international relations. For example, she was originally opposed to Reagan’s good and evil characterization of the United States and the Soviet Union, but later recanted, describing the Soviet Union as a “sad experiment practiced on a huge and helpless population” (Zelikow and Rice, 370). Even “Promoting the National Interest” contains moralistic undertones, stating that America was “on the right side of history” and that “American values are universal” (Rice, “National Interest,” 49). In actuality, few Americans can totally divorce morality from foreign policy. The Declaration of Independence itself states that “All (not only American) men are created equal” and possess basic rights. Rice best explains this apparent contradiction in a 1999 interview by explain that she was “a realist. Power matters. But there can be no absence of moral content in American foreign policy, and, furthermore, the American people wouldn’t accept such an absence” (Nordlinger, 36).

**Rice’s Shift.** Rice entered the position of national security advisor grounded in her realist worldview. As “Promoting the National Interest” stated, the new administration would focus on great power politics, primarily engaging China and Russia. Following the 9-11 attacks, attention naturally shifted to Afghanistan, the state that had hosted Al-Qaeda’s leaders and operatives. Operation Enduring Freedom was a reflexive reaction that did not itself represent any great foreign policy shift. But its unprecedented success further emboldened an administration that was ideologically inclined to see America’s role in the world in a new way.

Rice soon became the central figure in the shifting focus and “conceptual changes” of the Bush administration (Mann, 315). Beginning in early 2002, Rice began using rhetoric that illustrated a dramatically different view of America’s role in the world. On September 11, 2001, Rice had been scheduled to give a speech to the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. If she had given that speech as scheduled, it doubtless would have closely resembled “Pursuing the National Interest.” On April 29, 2002 she addressed that same body, but with a message whose content was markedly different from the earlier text. The United States now faced a period not only of “grave danger,” but also of “great opportunity.” She invoked the period from 1945 to 1947, when President Harry Truman and Secretary of State George Marshall undertook a massive and ultimately successful effort to rebuild Europe, guaranteeing a free and prosperous West to confront the Soviet Union (Rice, “Remarks on Foreign Policy”). Openly critiquing realism, Rice declared “realists downplay the importance of values and the internal structures of states, emphasizing instead the balance of power as the key to stability and peace.” As an alternative, “Neoliberals emphasize the primacy of values, such

as freedom and democracy and human rights and institutions in ensuring that a just political order is obtained” (Rice, “Remarks on Foreign Policy”). To this new Rice, the fall of the Soviet Union not only represented the defeat of a dangerous power that threatened the United States, but it also represented the victory of American values.

In the aftermath of 9-11, Rice described a world that no longer emphasized the great power rivalry so important to realists: “We may well be on the cusp of an era in which the world will not be bedeviled by great power rivalry. There will be differences among the great powers. But if the scales tip toward shared interest, rather than interest in conflict between them, this will truly be an era unlike any other.” The great powers were now on one side of a moral divide, and on the other side stood the “forces of chaos.” The task was a clear one, American foreign policy must now focus on solidifying this “balance of power that favors freedom (Rice, “Remarks on Foreign Policy”).” This slogan was an attempt to bridge the gap between realism and moralism. On close examination, however, it totally rejects the former. Realism focuses on the nuances of great power competition; competition that Rice claimed was no longer relevant. Realism also rejects the idea of focusing on political ideology, an outlook totally out of step with Rice’s clear line of moral demarcation. In April 2002 we meet a new Condoleezza Rice, a Rice who has described a worldview that she would have attacked only months before, and a Rice who was ready to use her “balance of power that favors freedom” to change the world.

As she was giving this landmark speech, behind the scenes in the White House Rice was working to make this new worldview official. Since 1986, presidents have been required to submit an overview of their national security strategy to the public. Richard Haass, the director of policy planning in the State Department and described as a “voice of the sober, moderate realist establishment” (Rosen) originally undertook the task of writing the Bush administration’s first NSS. However, in the winter of 2001-2002, Condoleezza Rice resolved to rewrite the document, deeming the initial draft, in the words of Phillip D. Zelikow, “too long, too much of a lowest common denominator document to cover all the bases. In other words, it was too much like its recent predecessors” (Zelikow interview). The administration was seeking something “bolder, something that would represent a more dramatic break with the ideas of the past” (Mann, 316). She assigned Zelikow, who had worked with her in the first Bush administration and together had co-authored *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, to draft a new NSS. The result was radically transformational in nature. As the document’s leading proponent, Condoleezza Rice had traveled far from her traditional realist roots.

**The Catalytic Event.** 1948 to 1991 was a period of relative stability in the international system. East and West neatly divided the world. American strategy focused on Soviet Union and its allies. Minor discrepancies between the U.S. and

its fellow western democracies were often overlooked because the common Soviet threat mandated unity. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a much more uncertain era, one in which two seemingly opposing trends surfaced. On one hand democracy seemed on an inevitable march to predominance as nation after nation emerged from the darkness of communism and dictatorship to embrace western-style freedom. On the other, the stability so long enforced by competition for influence between the two superpowers vanished, and long festering ethnic, religious and cultural tensions produced a new disorganized and bloody form of civil war that threatened the dominance of the nation state. In many ways this was the direct result of American policy and strategy in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As John Lewis Gaddis has perceptively asked, “What if the hidden history of the Cold War was one in which the great powers, under American tutelage, ultimately resolved most of their differences, only to find that their own power was no longer as great as it had once been?” (Gaddis, 78)

The remaining superpower, the United States, struggled to define its purpose in this new international system. Should the United States rest on its laurels and merely encourage democracy’s inevitable triumph, or should it use its new hegemony to ensure stability and protect human life in the violent new order? Neither of the first two post Cold War administrations addressed these questions or offered a clear statement of strategic purpose. Even George W. Bush’s administration initially failed to offer any drastic change. Instead, influenced by Rice and others it offered only a return to the emphasis on great power balance prevalent during the Cold War.

Then came the 9/11 attacks. Gaddis has compared this event to the burning of Washington by the British in 1813 and the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941. In both cases, a violent surprise attack illustrated the necessity to adapt to a changing world. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. adopted a new strategy with which to maintain security, the Monroe Doctrine and the Grand Alliance respectively. In his view, the 9/11 attacks were no different. “It was not just the Twin Towers that collapsed on the morning of September 11, 2001: so too did some of our most fundamental assumptions about international, national, and personal security” (Gaddis, 80). Although the post Cold War state of affairs, particularly the danger of terrorism grown out of the crumbling state system, had existed for a decade, 9/11 finally forced Americans to question their security in this new and violent world. As Rice observed in 2002, “The international system has been in flux since the collapse of Soviet power. Now it is possible -- indeed, probable -- that that transition is coming to an end” (Rice, “Remarks on Foreign Policy”).

The fallout of 9/11 was so powerful that many feel it to be the only necessary explanation for the dramatic shift in U.S. foreign policy that matured a year later in the *NSS*. This explanation is incomplete. Instead, Zelikow offers a deeper explanation by arguing that the 9/11 attacks “did not create a new error, but

they were a catalytic moment in our recognition of it” (Zelikow, “Transformation,” 17). In chemistry, a catalyst is used to spark a reaction in a combination of two or more substances. The catalyst itself is uninvolved and unaffected by the reaction, but it triggers a reaction between reactant substances that produces something entirely new. If the new product is the *NSS*, and the catalyst the 9/11 attacks, then in order to completely understand the reaction, and thus the great shift in foreign policy, one must find and analyze the reactant solutions, Rice’s evolving relationship with the president and the influence of neoconservative ideology.

**Relationship with Bush.** George W. Bush never expected to change the international system. When he began to consider running for president he had virtually no foreign policy experience and had voiced no public opinions on foreign policy. Bush understood his lack of experience and so he surrounded himself with experts. Preeminent among these was Rice. The two first met at Stanford during a 1998 meeting arranged by former Secretary of State George Shultz. In August of that same year when the two met again, they established a close relationship based as much on mutual interests and respect as professional necessity. Rice became the center of Bush’s foreign policy team that became known as “the Vulcans,” which came to include veteran Republicans such as Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney. Bush countered accusations of his inexperience in foreign policy by admitting that he “may not be able to tell you exactly the nuance of the East Timorian [sic] situation, but I’ll ask people who’ve had experience, like Condi Rice, Paul Wolfowitz, or Dick Cheney” (Heilbrunn, “Rice,” 49). These “good, strong, capable, smart people who understand the mission of the United States is to lead the world to peace” would also surround him as president (Mann, 255).

Despite being surrounded and heavily influenced by veteran Republicans, even during the campaign Bush occasionally reverted to a different rhetoric, one that focused not on great power diplomacy but on a broader view of America’s role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In his September 1999 speech at the Citadel, for example he praised the victory of “freedom and individual dignity.” in the Cold War and asserted that “the advance of freedom—from Asia to Latin America to East and Central Europe—is creating the conditions for peace” (Bush, “Period of Consequences”). This optimistic and idealistic view of the world would later surface, not as an undercurrent mentioned by an amateur drowned out by experts, but as the tide behind a powerful wartime president.

During the 2000 presidential campaign Rice’s realism guided Bush’s foreign policy rhetoric. Since their bonding in Maine, Rice was personally the closest to the president of the foreign policy advisors (Heilbrunn “Rice,” 49; Kessler, 5). This close relationship originally meant Rice heavily influenced the president’s views on foreign policy, as evidenced by her authorship of his official foreign policy agenda in “Pursuing the National Interest.” Following September 11, however, that relationship changed. In the months following the attacks the

president adopted a much more forceful position on national security. First, he drew a clear line between nations who supported the United States, and by extension freedom and democracy, and those who promoted terrorism, labeling them the “Axis of Evil” (Bush, “2002 State of the Union”). Further, he began to revert to rhetoric more representative of his earlier Citadel campaign speech than Rice’s traditional realism from “National Interest.” At the 2002 graduation at West Point, for example, Bush proclaimed that “Our nation's cause has always been larger than our nation's defense. We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace—a peace that favors human liberty.” Establishing such “a just peace” was “America’s opportunity, and America’s duty,” the president concluded (Bush, “West Point”).

Clearly the president had abandoned realism, a framework which focuses only on national defense, treats ideals such as freedom as distractions, and holds that true peace is unattainable in a dangerous world. The president was instead forcefully promoting something different: a simple portrayal of a free and democratic America on one side, and oppressive tyranny and terrorism on the other. Following the terrorist attacks, Bush assumed a more active position of leadership within his administration and. According to Robert Draper, the Bush tutorial was over. After 9/11 “he didn’t need their direction anymore” (Draper, 166). What resulted looked nothing like Rice’s realism.

Rather than seeking to contain the president’s bold new ideas, Rice promoted them. In April 2002 Rice claimed that “America seeks a great world beyond the victory over terror. We seek not merely to leave the world safer, but to leave it better; to leave it a world that makes it possible for all men and women to experience the exhilaration and the challenges of freedom” and that “Nations must decide which side they are on in the fault line that divides civilization from terror” (Rice, “Remarks on Foreign Policy”). This was not her merely echoing her boss; the very premise of Rice’s realism had been firmly shaken by 9/11. Realism focuses only on states, but Al Qaeda was not a state. Realism focuses on great powers; Afghanistan and Iraq were not great powers. Finally, realism focuses on deterrence, but deterrence is elusive when dealing with those for whom death is a means to an end. Rather than the relativism of intellectual debate, Bush’s more simplistic view of absolute right and wrong in international relations had much to recommend it in the wake of the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Rice admitted:

There are right and wrong choices and right and wrong acts. And governments are making them every day for their own people and for the people of the world. We can never let the intricacies of cloistered debate—with its many hues of gray and nuance—obscure the need to speak and act with moral clarity. We must recognize that some states or leaders will choose wrongly. We must recognize that truly evil regimes will never be reformed. And we must recognize that such regimes must be confronted, not coddled (Rice, “Remarks on Foreign Policy”).

As Bush developed this new mission for the United States, Rice's role in the administration changed. She was no longer the mentor; instead Bush was "actually influencing her, and she seems to be performing for him the immensely useful service of transforming shorthand impulses into developed, stated policy" (Lemann, 177). According to Nicholas Lemann, "When you hear Rice speaking, that's what Bush would sound like if he were as articulate as Rice is" (Lemann, 178). As Rice put it: "It's not my exercising influence over him. I'm internalizing his world" (Draper, 286). If anything, the relationship between the two deepened as they both developed a new worldview. According to Rice, Bush feels as if they have "grown up together, in terms of their approach to foreign policy" (Kessler, 5). Her longtime colleague, Zelikow, agrees that "a series of events and presidential judgments in 2001, very much including 9/11, had a powerful effect on her thinking" (Zelikow interview). One more factor remained, however, and in late 2001 and early 2002 Rice, always an academic, was forced to find an intellectual framework for the wartime administration. The intellectual framework she found was not new; it had existed in various forms since the 1970's. It is known as Neo-conservatism.

**Neoconservative Answer.** Since abandoning the Democratic Party in the 1970's, Neo-conservatism has long occupied an influential position within the Republican foreign policy establishment. Sharp critics of *détente*, neoconservatives have long opposed traditional realism, preferring a foreign policy based on American values rather than strict balance of power considerations. The debate within the Republican Party has swayed back and forth since Gerald Ford's failed 1976 reelection campaign, and neoconservatives have continually refined and adjusted their ideology and strategies. Thus, when her own realist worldview was seemingly discredited and with a president speaking of morality and great opportunity, Condoleezza Rice turned to the party's other foreign policy ideology to guide American grand strategy in the post-9/11 world.

Throughout their history, neoconservatives have focused on morality, both from a domestic and international perspective. They believed that the United States must confront evil in the world if its own intrinsically good values were to survive (Heilbrunn, *Right*, 142). Neoconservatives also felt that the only viable method of countering evil in the world was military power. According to one of the movement's patron saints, philosopher Leo Strauss, "The only restraint in which the West can put some confidence is the tyrant's fear of the West's immense military power" (Heilbrunn, *Right*, 50). Strauss is in many ways the antithesis of Rice's Morgenthau. Strauss denounced moral relativism, which in international relations meant tolerating tyrannical regimes for selfish gain. In his view, America must confront tyranny and evil, or face surrender. Strauss and his neoconservative disciples vilified those who appeased Hitler at Munich and they lionized Winston Churchill, who stood up to Nazi evil. Unlike Rice, Straussians were elated by Ronald Reagan's "evil empire" characterization of the Soviet Union.

Following the Cold War, neo-conservatism faced an internal debate threatening its very own existence. On one side the older generation claimed that the Soviet collapse signaled ultimate victory. According to Norman Podhoretz in 1996, neo-conservatism “no longer exists as a distinctive phenomenon” (Podhoretz, 19). In fact, many neoconservatives now turned to a more traditional realism as the proper post-Cold War foreign policy (Halper and Clarke, 78). A younger generation, however, came to embrace a new form of neo-conservatism. As Francis Fukuyama famously penned in 1989, the new neoconservatives believed the end of the Cold War represented the “end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Fukuyama). All that remained was to extend this ideological consensus to the rest of the world. The focus on American values, morality, military power and Israel remained. Now, unhindered by Soviet power and using its mastery of military technology, the United States must use its “unipolarity” to work to remake the world. This new genre shares realism’s focus on military power, but utilizes it for a higher purpose. Two prominent younger neoconservatives, William Kristol and Robert Kagan, explained that purpose in 1996:

Informed with a clear moral purpose, based on the understanding that its moral goals and its fundamental national interests are almost always in harmony. The United States achieved its present position of strength not by practicing a foreign policy of live and let live, nor by passively waiting for threats to arise, but by actively promoting American principles of governance abroad--democracy, free markets, respect for liberty (Kristol and Kagan, 20).

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the neoconservative movement possessed something no other group of foreign policy intellectuals could agree upon, a clear vision for the role of the United States in a post-Cold War unipolar world. Nonetheless, during the 2000 presidential election, neoconservatives such as Kristol backed John McCain, and found themselves alienated from the victorious Bush administration (Heilbrunn, *Right*, 230). After the 9/11 attacks, however, when Rice began looking for a new strategy with which to confront America’s newest enemies, she was well aware that the neoconservatives “had an entire program they could dust off and present to Bush” (Heilbrunn, *Right*, 245). Its inherent optimism regarding American values and power meshed well with the president’s rhetoric and beliefs, and it appeared to strike a responsive chord with Rice’s own moralistic leanings. Neo-conservatism also offered a means with which to use American power to tackle the perceived foundations of Islamic terror. Fareed Zakaria put it this way: “If you can get a democratic Afghanistan, a reformed Palestinian Authority and a democratizing Iraq they will send a powerful signal across the Muslim world” (Zakaria, 35). Perhaps most important; it offered a way for the

administration to channel the political capital it possessed following the 9/11 terror attacks into a great benevolent mission to remake the world.

**Consequences of Simplicity.** The 2002 *NSS* did not itself send the United States to Iraq. Zelikow explains that “the document was not/not drafted (sic) as a rationale for action against Iraq” (Zelikow interview). However, the simplistic ideas of the 2002 *NSS* represent the original shift in thinking that provided the strategic justification for the war in Iraq. Once the Bush administration accepted the fundamental neoconservative ideas of international moral dichotomy and the active use of military power to spread democracy, it was only natural, especially after 9/11, for other neoconservative ideas to surface, most especially the focus on the Middle East and Iraq. Despite the rhetoric about weapons of mass destruction, the *NSS* more truly revealed the underlying reasoning behind the invasion. WMD’s were the sales pitch, not the actual strategy. As Colin Powell biographer Karen DeYoung puts it: “if Bush was determined to invade Iraq, he would have to make the case on the basis of disarmament” (DeYoung, 404). By focusing on WMDs the administration could utilize existing U.N. resolutions to gain legitimacy and support. This indirect approach especially facilitated the approach to allies in the Middle East, some of which were actually targets of the intended democratic domino effect following success in Iraq.

Condoleezza Rice’s retreat from gray shaded nuance to moralistic simplicity was an important factor in the great shift in American foreign policy that occurred in 2002. Unfortunately, the consequences of this new strategy have been far from simple. Rather than welcoming American-style democracy, the Iraqi people have descended into ethnic, cultural and religious conflict bordering on civil war. There has been no democratic surge among Iraq’s neighbors; in fact the United States faces an increasingly bellicose Iran and a staunchly authoritarian Saudi monarchy. Despite the simplistic lure of a foreign policy based on morality, military power, and universal values, despite the appeal of remaking the world in the American image, the world stubbornly remains a complicated place. Nicholas Lemann ends his 2002 article on Rice with a poem written by one of her original realist heroes, Hans Morgenthau:

FORGET the sentimental notion that foreign policy is a struggle between  
virtue and vice, with virtue bound to win,  
FORGET the utopian notion that a brave new world without power politics  
will follow the unconditional surrender of wicked nations,  
FORGET the crusading notion that any nation, however virtuous and  
powerful, can have the mission to make the world over in its own image,  
REMEMBER that diplomacy without power is feeble, and power without  
diplomacy is destructive and blind,

REMEMBER that no nation's power is without limits, and hence that its policies must respect the power and interests of others (Morgenthau, quoted in Lemann, 179).

This poem highlights not only how far Rice had traveled intellectually, but also the intrinsic problems with the foreign policy found in the 2002 *NSS*. Rice's experience should serve as a warning: beware the illusion of a simple world. No matter how powerful the United States may be, America does not have the ability to do whatever it wants wherever it wants. Moreover, while the world may indeed be divided between good and evil, all forms of evil cannot be combined into one package to be addressed with one strategy. Finally, the United States must always reconcile its very ideological and moral foundations with the realities of a complex world. The ultimate realist, Henry Kissinger recognized that "from its beginning, Americans have believed this country had a moral significance that transcended its military or economic power" (Kissinger). These moral underpinnings have led Americans to pursue grand moral designs before. Following American entry into the First World War Woodrow Wilson issued his Fourteen Points, which outlined a new international system that promised perpetual peace for a war-weary world. Wilson was ultimately frustrated, however, by an existing international system that continued to illustrate its great complexity and tendency towards violent disorder.

Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even the massively powerful United States should not expect to be able to create a new, free and peaceful world out of this same anarchical system by spreading its own perceived universal values using American military might. America's difficulties of the past five years, largely the result of decisions made in accordance with the moral and transformational strategy outlined in the 2002 *NSS*, stand as an excellent illustration of the danger of succumbing to the "Lure of Simplicity."

### References

- Bush, George W. "A Period Of Consequences." Speech to the Citadel. Charleston, SC. September 23, 1999.  
<[http://www.citadel.edu/pao/addresses/pres\\_bush.html](http://www.citadel.edu/pao/addresses/pres_bush.html)>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "2002 State of the Union Address." Speech to Joint Session of Congress. Washington D.C. January 29, 2002.  
<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Graduation Speech at West Point." Speech to 2002 graduating class at the U.S. Military Academy. West Point, NY. June 1 2002.  
<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>>.
- Draper, Robert. *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush*. (New York, NY: The Free Press, 2007).
- Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History." *The National Interest* (Summer 1989)  
<<http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm>>.

- Gaddis, John Lewis. *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*. (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
- Goldberg, Jeffrey. "Breaking Ranks." *The New Yorker* 81.33 (October 31, 2005): 54-65.
- Halper, Stefan and Jonathan Clarke. *America Alone: The Neoconservatives and the Global Order*. (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Heilbrunn, Jacob. "Condoleezza Rice: George W.'s Realist." *World Policy Journal* 16.4 (Winter 1999): 49.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *They Knew They Were Right*. (New York: Doubleday, 2008).
- Kessler, Glenn. *The Confidante: Condoleezza Rice and the Creation of the Bush Legacy* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2007).
- Kristol, William and Robert Kagan. "A National Humiliation." *Weekly Standard* (April 16, 2001): 11.
- Lemann, Nicholas. "Without a Doubt." *The New Yorker* 78.31 (October 14, 2002): 164-179.
- Mann, James. *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet*. (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2004).
- May, Ernest R. *American Cold War Strategy; Interpreting NSC-68*. (Boston, MA: Bedford, 1993).
- Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. (New York, A. A. Knopf, 1949).
- Nordlinger, Jay. "Star-in-Waiting: Meet George W.'s Foreign Policy Czarina." *National Review* 51.16 (August 30, 1999): 35-37.
- Rice, Condoleezza. "Campaign 2000 – Promoting the National Interest." *Foreign Affairs* 79.1 (January-February 2000): 45-62.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Remarks by National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice on Terrorism and Foreign Policy." Speech to Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. Johns Hopkins University. Washington D.C. April 19, 2002. <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020429-9.html>>
- Rosen, Gary. "Bush and the Realists." *Commentary* 120.2 (September 2005): 31-38.
- The White House. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002*. (Washington, DC: The Government Printing House, 2002).
- Zakaria, Fareed. "Bush, Rice and The 9-11 Shift: Rice knows that American activism can generate a backlash, but she also knows there's no alternative." *Newsweek* (December 16, 2002): 35.
- Zelikow, Philip and Condoleezza Rice. *Germany United and Europe Transformed*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Transformation of National Security." *The National Interest* (Spring 2003): 17-29. *General OneFile*. Gale. Virginia Military Institute. April 18, 2008 <<http://find.galegroup.com/itx/start.do?prodId=ITOF>>
- \_\_\_\_\_. Principal author of the 2002 NSS. Interview, February 19, 2008, transcript in author's possession.