

The presidency of George W. Bush has stimulated extensive research on the part of academic scholars. The pronouncement of a “new doctrine” comprised of ideas like preemption, and the notion that the war on terror cannot be won on the defensive has caused many to speculate whether or not this new grand strategy for national security will dominate other areas of the United States’ policy making as well. A variety of proposed explanations and predictions have been made regarding the ostensibly new and atypical actions of the US.

Scholars like John Ikenberry and Joseph Nye argue that Bush Doctrine tactics and the “show of arrogance on foreign policy” (Nye, 2002) are exclusive to the Bush administration and represent only a temporary departure from the US’s best interest approach, multilateralism. Ikenberry argues that radical neo-conservatives have pushed the US to a more unilateralist strategy, but the end of their influence on policy will allow the US to once again resume multilateralism as the optimal and seemingly only option (Ikenberry, 2004). John Ruggie defines political multilateralism as “...a form of engagement that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct.” He elaborates to say that the application of multilateralism in foreign policy must include firstly: “an investment in the creation and maintenance of international institutions who serve to facilitate coordination” and secondly: “compliance with rules, norms, principles, and decision making processes of these institutions in an equal balance with all other complying states” (Ruggie, 1993).

Applying this definition to US foreign policy behavior, research suggests that the US has been separating itself from multilateralism predating the Bush administration and that the strategy of unilateralism now dominates the US’s foreign policy agenda. While

Ruggie provides a well accepted definition of multilateralism, the term unilateralism is a concept that has yet to find a common, or agreed upon definition. One could of course say that unilateralism is simply action or policy that is contrary to traditional multilateral practices and norms. Most scholars define unilateralism by acts rather than by a guideline but there are still those that propose to identify an operational definition. The two definitions found to be most useful for this analysis are those of David Malone and Yuen Khong, along with the definition provided by Caroline Fehl. Malone and Khong provide a working definition of unilateralism as states choosing to “opt out” of multilateral frameworks or “act alone” in regards to a global or regional challenge because they feel generalized norms or principles proposed by multilateral coalitions will act against state interests (2003). Fehl identifies unilateralism as “any policy or proposal that departs from generalized principles of conduct in negotiations, the decision-making processes of formalized institutions, or delineating principles of collective security and economic openness” (Fehl, 2008).

Using these definitions of unilateralism we can now analyze US foreign policy in order to determine if the US’s policy reflects more dominant traits of multilateralism, or unilateralism. As a foreign policy strategy, unilateralism is often studied most intently on its foreign implications and regarded as an international relations issue. This study will attempt to look at the domestic side of unilateralist strategy by providing an extensive analysis of domestic rhetoric promoting unilateralism in order to understand the depth and nature of domestic support for unilateralism. This paper will ultimately seek to satisfy the following questions: How is the idea of unilateralism being promoted through recent American governmental rhetoric? And: Can we identify unilateralist support

growing in the present American political culture?

While the US has adhered to investing in and maintaining certain international institutions, a key trait identified by Ruggie, it has markedly steered away from compliance with the norms and principles set by those institutions. A bipolar world emerged in the post World War II era and the US sought, through proxy wars and the space race among other things, to establish its superiority over the Soviet Union. The US attempted to gain the most allies and set the groundwork for establishing itself as a hegemon. Hegemony is a type of authority which cannot retain power based on coercion alone. Hegemony requires “the institutionalized consent of other states” (Skidmore, 2005). The US consequently invested in institution building and multilateral agreements in order to gain a hegemonic legitimacy. However, the US’s involvement was characterized by “institutional bargaining” (Ikenberry, 2002). US involvement provided benefits such as a stable dollar for the international monetary system, economic and military aid, access to US markets and so forth. In exchange for the benefits, the US would reserve the freedom to act outside of institutionalized norms and rules on various occasions with out repercussion. Examples include the US’s outright rejection to the International Court of Justice’s 1984 ruling of violation of law in regards to Nicaragua, and the 38 year late ratification of the Genocide Convention with the requirement of the ability to “opt out” on passing a formal decision (Skidmore, 2005).

The eventual end of the Cold War suggested the end of institutional bargaining and states began expecting to see more compliance on behalf of the US. To their dismay though, the end of the Cold War marked the beginning descent into a stance of unilateralism (Kupchan and Turbowitz, 2007). The unilateralist trend can be traced as

early as 1992, just one year after the official dissolution of the former Soviet Union. A Department of Defense policy document stated that “we should plan for future coalitions to be ad hoc assemblies, often not lasting beyond the crisis being confronted, and in many cases carrying only general agreement over the objectives to be accomplished” (Tyler, 1992). The path to unilateralism has been subtly making its way into the US grand strategy; subtly at least until the Bush administration.

The rhetoric and syntax of the Bush administration is certainly “the most forward and drastic display of US unilateralism, but not the first” (Klare, 2001). Former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld released numerous statements referring to “rotating” and “ad hoc” style coalitions (Barry, 2001). The *National Security Strategy of the United States* released under the Bush administration, Quadrennial Defense Review drafted weeks before 9/11 and other policy and strategy papers are heavily laded with unilateralist tendencies and tactics.

Extensive research and data collection of scholarly articles, white papers, speeches and policy and strategy statements of purpose will comprise the bulk of data for my analysis. Having assembled this data I will begin a neo-Aristotelian rhetorical breakdown and analysis. This process will be achieved by implementing the five canons of rhetoric and seeking confirmation on unilateralism by means of internal and external truths. Internally these truths are examined in three ways. The first being ethos, that is, seeing if the speakers goals (in this case the goal is domestic support for unilateralist foreign policy) are accomplished due to the speakers authoritative position. Secondly I will look at pathos, goals accomplishment by appealing to the audience’s emotions such as fear, and lastly the examination of logos. Logos rests on the base of logic and statistics

to achieve goals. Externally, truths are identified by the use of former rhetoric holding significant value to an audience such as powerful quotes from Kennedy or Roosevelt.

This communication discipline approach will help expand the rhetorical analysis beyond simple identification of terms in data collected matched with unilateralist definitions. Understanding the domestic factors for, and the implications this strategy will invoke is critical in understanding how the theme of unilateralism has infiltrated institutions, policy, and public acceptance and support. This will be measured by looking at public opinion polls, the development of new think tanks specifically oriented with this strategy, and how unilateralist policy has permeated society through means of academia.

From a political science perspective, this paper will be able to enlighten further an all ready heavy and existing debate. Beyond just the mentioned disciplines though, this paper seeks to provide valuable information for all academia in that the specific domestic aspect of this study is crucial to all. Understanding the US's global strategy and how that strategy affects us within the US is critical in that the domestic implications may affect federal budgets, resource development, military procurement, and much more to be identified.