The fact that hegemonic powers tend to pursue their interests unilaterally and define their interests in very broad terms has been clearly developed by Jervis in the foregoing essay. But nations also have a choice in how their power should be used as well as the ability to note the possible limits on that power. The United States after World War II had a kind of influence that would have made an almost exclusive reliance on hard power a possibility, but the United States chose to use that influence to build institutions that would regularize what it and others would do. The thesis to be developed in this chapter is that the present U.S. policy preference—to act unilaterally and rely to a great extent on force to establish a new and better world order—is apt to be counterproductive in the long run.

A self-defeating hubris is one likely outcome. It is true the U.S. has the capabilities of winning conventional wars against most other states and could remain the single strongest military power in the world for some time to come. Moreover, that power can be used to intimidate allies and neutral states to follow the U.S. lead in dealing with the major adversaries it faces today—that is, rogue leaders and non-state actors embracing terrorist and/or guerrilla warfare tactics. The elimination of tyrannical regimes, if they provide support for such terrorist operations and/or on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons, is even possible, as we have seen. But the present administration is defining enemies in ways that will keep the United States in a constant state of conflict. Not only that, it is overestimating U.S. ability to actually accomplish its foreign policy goals and underestimating the costs it will have to pay in the process.

Before proceeding with the analysis, some definitions and a short historical detour are in order. “Power” is defined as the ability to achieve one’s goals in a possibly intractable environment through a variety of means of “influence”—that is, force, intimidation, rewards, punishments, or persuasion. “Terrorism” involves the use or threat of violence, usually in unexpected ways against civilian populations, to create fear in a larger audience. Targets are chosen for their shock and propaganda value. The goal is to create fear in a broader audience so that they will pressure governments to make political concessions desired by the terrorists. The perpetrators are usually non-state actors, or sometimes agents of foreign governments. But, at times, some tyrants may employ acts of terror against their own population as a means of eliminating all forms of opposition. Even democratic states have occasionally engaged in...
acts in which targets are chosen for their shock value in an endeavor to bring an end to war. The Allied bombing of Dresden during World War II is one example along these lines. The city was chosen because it offered many so called “virgin” targets. 5

“Guerrilla warfare,” by way of contrast, is a form of combat in which irregular armed forces engage in hit-and-run tactics against a larger, more organized adversary. Ordinarily they operate in small groups, particularly when in an urban center, and are resourceful in their choice of targets and weapons. They depend on a supportive, or at least a neutral population, to provide recruits, intelligence, money, supplies, and shelter. Sympathetic neighbors, too, may provide assistance and sanctuary. To maintain this popular support, guerrillas need a political program that is attractive to many people, and propaganda to proclaim their successes. At times, they may use terror against their adversary or collaborators in the population upon which they depend. Their goal is to wear the adversary down—either to motivate a withdrawal of an occupying power, or to buy time until they can engage in broad-scale combat against the government they oppose. 6

Historically, persons embracing terrorist tactics have had a variety of political goals and have operated in many different kinds of settings. Back in the days of the Roman Republic, the Jewish Zealots, or Sicarii, used terrorist tactics to stop their fellow Jews from collaborating with Roman authorities. Others have employed terror in the ostensible service of goals so fantastical or beyond their reach that destruction or greed seems to be their major purpose. These include such diverse groups as the Japanese doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyo as well as several American groups in the recent past—the Weathermen, the Symbionese Liberation Army, 7 or the murderous rampages of Charles Manson’s group, “Helter Skelter.” But terrorist operations may also be employed by a people against occupying powers or as operations in the early stages of their efforts to build a new state. The Viet Cong, for example, during the Vietnam War, assassinated village leaders who collaborated with the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) or the United States as a part of their overall operation. Today, Al Qaida, the “base,” is but one of many terrorist groups in operation around the world. Currently more than 280 organizations have been labeled as terrorist groups under President Bush’s Executive Order 13324. 8 These groups are found all over the globe—from the Abdu Nidal Organization that was in Iraq and Lebanon, to the Abu Sayyaf Group in Malaysia, to the World Tamil Movement. 9

Groups that have employed guerilla tactics, too, are quite varied. Many have fought wars of national self-determination. These include the South Carolina irregulars, led by Francis Marion, during the American Revolutionary War; the guerilla peasant bands that fought Napoleon in Spain in 1808–1814; the native forces in the Philippines who fought the United States in 1898 after it had acquired the islands from Spain; T.E. Lawrence and his Arab forces against the Turks in the Middle East during WWI; the Irish Republican Army (IRA) against Great Britain from 1919–1921; and the mujahideen against the Soviet army in Afghanistan from 1979–1989. 10 At times it may be difficult to even distinguish between these two types of irregular warfare. Groups that primarily employ guerilla tactics, in which the focus of their attacks is on the military or police supporting the adversary, may also employ violence against leaders or engage in various kinds of sabotage that lead to the killing of innocent civilians. Indeed, three Nobel Peace Prize winners in the latter