CHAPTER 1

The Paradigm Shifts

Shifts happen. Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. national confidence might well have been at an all-time high. The United States had defeated an ideological foe, not by force of arms, but on the battlefield of ideas and markets. Reluctant allies of the former Soviet Union now scrambled to place themselves under America’s protective umbrella by seeking to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). U.S. culture and the English language ranged to all azimuths. A new age of information technology further solidified U.S. global leadership while fueling an unprecedented decade of economic growth and wealth creation. American military might was unchallenged. A U.S.-led coalition pushed back Saddam Hussein’s attempt to control the oil fields of the Persian Gulf, strengthening the rule of law and non-proliferation norms. Stock market indexes reached dizzying heights, reflecting U.S. primacy and good fortune.

This era of good feeling was short-lived. Within a decade, the self-congratulatory mood that dominated earlier political commentary had begun to ring hollow. By the end of the Clinton administration, the dominant images of the United States projected in foreign capitals were, to be sure, American primacy in economic strength, entrepreneurship, military might, and continued leadership in the information revolution. But other images of the United States also reverberated across the globe—images that badly corroded U.S. standing as the “indispensable nation,” to use one of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s favorite phrases. These images included extended haggling over a reduction of U.S. dues to the United Nations during an era of unprecedented national prosperity; carrying out military campaigns or punitive acts by remote control; and the defeat of the Comprehensive

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Test Ban Treaty by Senate Republicans, who argued, to an incredulous international community, that the world’s pre-eminent conventional and nuclear power could be disadvantaged by giving up testing indefinitely.

At decade’s end, allied military actions in the Balkans, which were so wrenching politically to NATO, resulted in qualified successes and extended peacekeeping operations. The Clinton administration’s most consequential decision in Europe, the expansion of NATO to include former states of the Warsaw Pact, set in motion repeated dilemmas about inclusion and exclusion. Every addition raised the prospects of further weakening the utility of NATO as a military alliance and fueling retrograde tendencies in the Russian Federation.

Meanwhile, the bull market finally turned bearish. Free markets were not a panacea for many countries suffering from severe economic distress. Globalization turned out to be a distinctly regional phenomenon. The American political system continued to have admirers around the world, but the champion of democracy suffered embarrassing voting irregularities in the 2000 presidential election. Friendly foreign governments worried increasingly about the distractions, partisanship, and insularity of U.S. politics. Nor was the clear, continuing pre-eminence of U.S. military might very helpful in dealing with many of the international security problems facing the United States in the post-Cold War period—especially problems relating to weapons of mass destruction.

The cross-cutting effects of the information and military revolutions became increasingly apparent as the first post-Cold War decade progressed. Integrative and entropic effects proceeded concurrently. Some sought higher consciousness while others sought refuge in fundamentalism. Gaps between rich and poor grew. The selective benefits of globalization resulted in opportunities for the favored and seething resentments among the unfortunate. Synthesis and antithesis ground against each other along the fault lines of international politics. The pervasiveness of U.S. popular culture, the dominance of the U.S. economy, and the extension of American power projection capabilities grated on friends as well as potential adversaries. The computer’s lines of code, software, and hardware were instruments of uplifting for some, while others chose truck bombs or strapped themselves with explosives. Separate wiring diagrams formed for the upwardly mobile in this lifetime and those heavenly bound in the next.

The primary beneficiary and target of these dichotomies was clearly the United States, the place where upward mobility, entrepreneurship, and wealth accumulation were most advanced and democratic. As America became increasingly advantaged, critics began to caricature Washington as