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# American Foreign Policy of the Twenty-first Century: *Security through the Promotion of Democracy*

by Grace Thompson

*Each year, the Margaret Chase Smith Library sponsors an essay contest for Maine high school seniors. We feature here Grace Thompson's 2005 first place prize-winning essay, which draws upon historical examples as well as personal experiences and opinions.*

“THE SURVIVAL OF LIBERTY IN OUR land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world,” stated President George W. Bush as he was sworn in for a second term as president of the United States. History has proven time and again that the spread of freedom is the only way to counter tyranny. Democracy is the only means by which to offset despotism and totalitarianism. Recent developments in places such as the Ukraine and the Middle East have verified that freedom and democracy are not just Western ideals, but rather the universal ideals of mankind. People in the Middle East now have hope that they never had before. However, we have also borne witness to the fact that there are those who wish to deny this inherent right to others and who will stop at almost nothing to push their abominable agenda. Thus, in an age of ambiguity, we must remain steadfast. In a time in which others seek to rattle our foundation, we must stand strong. In a world of peoples and nations seeking freedom, we must encourage liberty and democracy. We must do this not because we necessarily want to, but rather because it is essential in guaranteeing American and global security. Thus, American foreign policy must be based

on three critical components that work together seamlessly to provide peace and stability in an uncertain world: the use of military force, alone or preemptively if necessary; military dominance; and the promotion of democracy.

It is difficult to compare this post-September 11th world to any other time in American history. September 11, 2001, was the first time an enemy was able to wreak such havoc directly on American soil, even in light of historical events such as the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The attacks that took place on that clear Tuesday morning are symbolic of the threats that exist in a world wrought by globalization. These are rather new threats that require a new strategy. This is not a matter of choice but of necessity.

When the Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a myriad of experts ingenuously touted the rise of a “new world order” in which war was obsolete. However, all of that changed on September 11, 2001. The atrocious murder of 3,000 innocent people brutally shocked us into the reality that we are not as impervious as was originally thought. The reactive strategies of deterrence and containment, which were the underpinnings of U.S. foreign policy from the end of World War II through September 10, 2001, are therefore not

applicable to American foreign policy of the twenty-first century. Those particular strategies are no longer viable counters to shadowy terrorist networks or the militant regimes which harbor them, the former not bound by international law. They also are not viable counters to rogue states run by tyrannical and irrational dictators who may be in possession of some of the most lethal weapons man has ever concocted. Instead of being passive, we must use our military dominance proactively. In today's globalized world, threats from terrorist organizations and rogue states can emerge faster than in the past, and any future attacks by such groups would most likely prove extremely devastating. Thus, it would be irrational to sit and wait for the next catastrophic attack on the American homeland. Why not thwart these known and pending hazards before they fully materialize? It is wishful thinking to assume that these threats can be deterred by traditional means alone.

American military dominance is of considerable importance because the United States is currently the only guarantor of global peace and security. There are those in the United States who are uncomfortable with the idea of retaining so much power, arguing that it works against world peace. However, a lack of American military dominance could ultimately put American and global peace in jeopardy in the face of rising powers whose politics are not congruent with liberty and democracy. The United States won the Cold War in part because our military was so strong that the Soviets could no longer prove to be formidable rivals. However, during the 1990s, a time in which war was not apparently imminent, American military power was significantly reduced. Granted, it still reigned supreme; however, emerging powers and rogue regimes were not as dissuaded by a military that appeared to be downsizing. Rising and rogue states must recognize the futility of possible aggression against the

United States. Maintaining the supremacy of our armed forces is critical in deterring the rise of other potential powers and will prevent against future arms races.

While military dominance and the use of military force are clearly attributes of a successful American foreign policy, it would be incomplete were it not to actively promote democracy. The promotion of democracy is the critical final touch that allows all three components of U.S. foreign policy to work together harmoniously. We cannot be satisfied simply with the defeat of terrorists and tyrants, but rather we must go further by replacing their radical visions of society and their militant behavior with something better. Refusal to do this would be akin to wasting our current position in the world. This is not to say that the United States should attempt to take out every non-democratic regime. Rather, by concentrating on perfecting democracy in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan, we can provide an example for other nations in the region and the world to follow. By encouraging serious governmental and economic reform in nations where freedom does not reign, we can plant the seed that will eventually flower into democracy.

President Bush wrote in the National Security Strategy in September 2002, "A world where some live in comfort and plenty while half the human race lives on less than \$2 a day, is neither just nor stable." Development of the world's most underdeveloped societies is an issue of national security. While poverty does not necessarily have a direct connection with terrorism, poverty breeds resentment and frustration, which radical ideological groups can use to garner support for their malicious causes. This is especially the case in countries in which poverty is coupled with a lack of basic freedoms and political rights. The root cause of poverty is social injustice and the debauched government that encourages it. It is in these conditions, in which poverty acts as an assault on human dignity, that human

anger thrives. Therefore, development assistance must not be solely economic. The goal is the vital social and political precondition for adequate development; it is the way by which to undermine the social support structures of terrorism.

Time and again democracy has proven to be the only means by which to strike at the root causes of tyranny and turmoil. Democracy helped a fledgling nation to defeat the most powerful nation of the eighteenth century. Democracy persevered through the bloody American Civil War. Democracy defeated Nazism during World War II. Democracy overwhelmed totalitarianism during the Cold War. Democracy is the system that best serves the demands of human dignity. Thus, it is democracy that will prove to be the greatest weapon against desolation and despotism, and the greatest patron of American and global peace and security.

Our job as Americans will certainly not be easy. Regarding her world tour of 1954 and 1955, Senator Margaret Chase Smith noted that she had made trips abroad every three or four years so that she could "see, first-hand, world conditions that present problems of world leadership that have been thrust upon us, whether we like it or not—leadership that cannot be abdicated without abdicating our own freedom and safety." There are undoubtedly Americans throughout this grand nation who are perfectly happy leading their own lives, minding their own business, wondering, "Why must we take on such a challenging role in the world? And why must that role belong to America?" The only simple answer is that history has put us in this place in time, and the job is ours to do. No other nation comes close to rivaling the awesome power of the United States of America, and consequently, no other nation could possibly take on the job of promoting freedom in the most desolate corners of the globe. Time is of the essence. American supremacy may not

last forever, and thus the time is now to use our extraordinary power to promote peace. Either we choose to shun this great responsibility and continue to go about our own lives in freedom while others live in darkness, or we choose to step up to the plate and ensure American and global security the only guaranteed way: by arming ourselves with our spirit and bolstering our status with our might in order to spread and promote freedom throughout the world. I would like to close with the words of a fellow Mainer, the renowned poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. These are the same words that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sent in a letter to Sir Winston Churchill during Britain's darkest hour at the beginning of World War II, words that would make an appearance in one of the prime minister's rousing speeches to the British people, and words that still resonate today as America takes on a momentous task:

...Sail on, O Ship of State!  
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!  
Humanity with all its fears,  
With all the hopes of future years,  
Is hanging breathless on thy fate! 🦋



**Grace Thompson** is a 2005 graduate of Yarmouth High School. She is currently attending the University of Maryland, where she plans to major in international relations.