

PURSUIING THE
GLOBAL
COMMON GOOD

Principle and Practice in U.S. Foreign Policy

Edited by
Sally Steenland, Peter Rundlet,
Michael H. Fuchs & David Buckley

Center for American Progress





AP Photo

PRACTICING THE GLOBAL COMMON GOOD

A Policymaker's Point of View

Tom Daschle and John D. Podesta

Our nation's capital city is at the center of many important and influential debates on some of the most vital issues facing the world, yet in the eyes of many, Washington is a caricature of unprincipled government—self-interested actors looking to advance their own careers and interests at the expense of the common good. This caricature is well-earned in some ways. Washington is continually rocked by stories of corruption and deceit that lend credence to the belief that personal profit or position mostly triumphs in the back corridors of power. These scandals, however, obscure the vibrant debate on matters of policy and principle—debates that are grounded in the ideals of the global common good.

Indeed, the central tenets of the global common good presented in the essays in this volume are in fact embraced throughout Washington. Across the many agencies and branches of government, elected representatives and appointed and career policymakers represent a kaleidoscope of belief systems. Secular or religious, these men and women are influenced heavily by their very personal and very individual beliefs. But the link between the divergent beliefs of our diverse country is our shared humanity.

After all, most Americans believe the United States has a unique responsibility in world affairs and expect their leaders to act on that responsibility. So far in this book, we've looked at how the United States can best employ American power and prosperity to help alleviate suffering, protect the vulnerable, and create a better world for both present and future generations. We believe these principles define the global common good and should guide U.S. foreign policy for the benefit of our nation and all humanity. We believe the exercise of these principles is not only possible but imperative.

American Leadership and Promotion of the Global Common Good

History and current events demonstrate that American foreign policy often promotes the global common good. Our leaders, past and present, have embraced many of the ideals discussed in this book, such as the concepts of “just war” and “the responsibility to protect,” or the essential humanity of foreign assistance and outlawing torture. More recently, protecting the environment has increasingly become recognized as a global common good. Our personal experiences in both the executive and legislative branches have proven to us that when decisions such as these are made, values play an essential role.

Sanctioning and implementing the use of force is the most contentious of policy issues. The caricature of Washington has it that war is waged to gain more oil, or more contracts for big business, or in pursuit of imperial ambitions, or to “wag the dog” to divert the attention of the

American public away from some other issue. In fact, authorizing the use of force is rarely a straightforward decision, but one never divorced from our highest principles.

All uses of force must be just. Sometimes we are forced to stand firm against aggression. And sometimes there is a responsibility to protect the innocent abroad—conditions when we are compelled by our sheer humanity to act when the humanity of others is being denied. Force, alas, is sometimes the only language understood by the perpetrators. In the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999, for example, just war and the responsibility to protect went hand in hand. Diplomacy had been exhausted on the deaf ears of Serbian leaders, and the plight of the Kosovar Albanians was immediate and grave. When action was taken, the use of force was neither excessive nor misused, as our mission sought to protect the innocent and enforce international law.

That war was the first fought almost entirely from the air, raising a new set of ethical considerations for the White House and Congress. Ethicists such as Michael Walzer argue that conducting a war entirely from the air, which lowers the risk to our troops but increases the risk of innocent people being killed in bombing, fundamentally changes the just war calculus for the United States. Walzer goes so far as to echo Albert Camus, writing that “you can’t kill unless you are prepared to die.”¹

Walzer and others underestimate the risks taken by NATO pilots and personnel in Kosovo and Serbia, yet the United States did heed some of those arguments at the time. Case in point: The United States instituted a rigorous review of all targets and made special calculations of the potential collateral damage of all targeting decisions. These are hard decisions to make, yet they are part and parcel of a just war military strategy that builds on the principles of the global common good.

“In the 21st century, U.S. interests have become truly global and since our actions are also global, we cannot leave our values at the ocean’s edge. American leaders must remember that our foreign policy is perceived abroad as a representation of our values at home.”

Our nation has a much longer history of treating individuals humanely and outlawing torture. The founding fathers wrote in the Bill of Rights that no “cruel and unusual punishment” shall be inflicted upon those accused or convicted of wrongdoing. In 1949, the United States signed the Fourth Geneva Convention, which bans torture and states that prisoners of war “shall in all circumstances be treated humanely.” Then, in 1994, the United States ratified the U.N. Convention Against Torture. Despite our own checkered past of living up to these ideals—most notably our past treatment of African Americans and Native Americans—we have made significant strides in practicing what we preach both at home and abroad.

To our profound regret, the Bush administration has failed to uphold these principles, as evidenced by the heinous treatment of inmates at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. The administration’s actions represent a radical departure from traditional American values of

humane and civilized treatment and our country's longstanding compliance with domestic and international law. Those who would argue that we need to forsake the liberties of some to secure the liberties of others misunderstand the fundamental American principle underscored by John F. Kennedy when he promised we would bear any burden to protect liberty.

Global environmental justice is a far more recent principle for most Americans and their political representatives and government officials in Washington. After a long slumber, the United States is now taking important steps to develop more environmentally friendly policies. In fact, local and state leaders are well ahead of our national leaders, making up for the lack of progress in combating global warming at a national level by recognizing the huge ethical and security imperatives at stake and then acting on those convictions.

Even though the United States has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol, 522 mayors have pledged that their cities will meet the standards defined by these global accords. Officials believe that the mayors' actions played a significant role in the 1.3 percent drop in U.S. fossil fuel-related emissions in 2006.² And the recent announcement by the National Governors Association that states should play a greater role in combating climate change will only build on the good work started by many of America's mayors.

These early statements of principle from the American heartland helped prompt the U.S. Senate this past summer to pass an important energy bill. The new legislation will promote greater use of biofuels, penalize gasoline price gouging, encourage more government investigations into oil companies' wholesale and retail pricing decisions, strengthen federal support for research into fuel-efficient vehicles, and promote projects that test capturing carbon dioxide from coal-burning plants.³ The House soon followed by passing its own bill.

This is a good start, but we must improve on these initial steps at the federal level. National policymakers must learn from the actions of their local counterparts to take global action on this issue of critical importance. Only when policymakers in Washington grasp the shared humanity implicit in protecting our planet from the ravages of global warming will they take the steps necessary in the United States to protect those in the world most vulnerable to climate change.

Conversely, the use of foreign aid in the promotion of the global common good is a far more controversial topic for policymakers than it should be. The growing perception of foreign aid as a "giveaway" of taxpayer money has contributed to Congress' inability to pass a foreign aid authorization since 1985. Yet foreign assistance is essential for both U.S. national security interests and our moral stature in the world. Much of the developing world relies on aid from the United States. The aid recipients see the United States as a beacon of hope, where the fundamental well-being of people is not constrained by borders or nationalities.

When the two of us were serving in government, we acted directly on this vision, proudly joining in a global effort—alongside a remarkable coalition that included Pope John Paul II and rock star Bono—to increase foreign aid funding dramatically in 1999 and 2000 for highly indebted poor countries. More recent instances of U.S. relief aid after natural disasters, such as the 2004 tsunami and earthquakes in Iran and Pakistan, prove that the United States sees itself as a first responder to global humanitarian crises. In a clear show of how bipartisan U.S.

foreign policy can further the global common good, former Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton teamed up to lead the tsunami response.

More telling, perhaps, are the actions of average Americans on the front lines—from the employees of the U.S. Agency for International Development to the men and women of the U.S. military—who implement the foreign aid decisions made every day by the U.S. government to promote the well-being of people around the world. That is why slashing non-military assistance foreign aid and subsuming the role of USAID within the Department of State only signal the intention of the United States to decrease its commitment to the impoverished people of the world. U.S. foreign aid and development assistance are essential components of the U.S. role as a moral leader. Few decisions a policymaker faces are more indicative of our commitment to our shared humanity.

Doing Well by Doing Good

In the 21st century, U.S. interests have become truly global. And since our actions are also global, we cannot leave our values at the ocean's edge. American leaders must remember that our foreign policy is perceived abroad as a representation of our values at home. At the moment, much of the international community considers us an unrestrained, belligerent nation that disobeys international law, disrespects the environment, and disregards those in need of greater protection and aid. Such perceptions have led to a dangerous decline in America's moral authority. At no point in our history have we been more disliked or more distrusted around the world than today.

We cannot hope to live up to our values or protect our interests without a foreign policy that embodies both. The issues discussed in the preceding pages of this book, and especially the policy recommendations presented by their authors, are of critical importance for U.S. foreign policy decision-makers. Pursuing the global common good will enable the United States to regain its moral authority.

In particular, the manner in which this generation of U.S. leaders handles climate change—an existential challenge of particularly acute moral and security significance—will set the tone for a new century of principled U.S. foreign policy. It is the central challenge our statesmen must confront in order to live up to American ideals and values.

We both have confidence our leaders can rise to this challenge because we fervently believe that the global common good is not a partisan idea. Rather, it is the bridge between opposing ideologies. Though many policymakers and politicians believe in different means to achieve their goals, we must all recognize that often enough we do desire similar ends. The ONE Vote '08 campaign, which seeks to make global health and extreme poverty priorities in the 2008 presidential campaign, is one such example of a bipartisan effort to find common ground, despite differing beliefs.⁴

We have risen to such a challenge before in our recent history. Consider the origins of the Truman Doctrine. As the United States and the Soviet Union slipped inexorably into the Cold War, U.S. leaders in 1947 feared that a Europe in ashes would be unable to fight off the expansion of Soviet Communism. In Truman's bid to aid the faltering regimes in Greece

and Turkey, he needed support from the Republican Congress, some of whose members were increasingly looking inward.

“...the global common good is not a partisan idea. Rather, it is the bridge between opposing ideologies. Though many policymakers and politicians believe in different means to their goals, we must all recognize that often enough we do desire similar ends.”

As one story goes, Truman called Republican Senator Arthur Vandenburg and other congressional leaders into his office to sell the plan. Truman's secretary of state, George C. Marshall, forthrightly explained the need to urgently fund the Greeks and Turks, but there was little immediate response. Dean Acheson, Marshall's undersecretary of state at the time (and his successor), spoke up, urging his audience to understand that, as author David McCullough summarized it, “Greece was the rotten apple that would infect the barrel.” Without U.S. aid, he warned, Soviet Communism would spread throughout Europe.

Vandenburg turned to Truman and said that if the president would explain it to Congress in that same way, Truman would have Vandenburg's support and that of Congress as well. This aid in opposition to Communist expansion became known as the Truman Doctrine, and was followed by widespread aid to Europe in the form of the Marshall Plan. Despite Republican aims of cutting spending, Truman and Acheson were able to strike a common chord that united the parties by highlighting the moral and security threat posed by Soviet expansion.⁵ It was these acts of generosity and leadership that helped secure the U.S. position as the leader of the free world in the decades to follow.

The history of American foreign policy is replete with the stories of statesmen struggling to stay true to their principles, despite the weight of the world bearing down on them. It is even in those darkest moments of the collective national memory, such as the battle against fascism, where principle shines through in even the seemingly most immoral of times.

Emerging from those dark days, Harry Truman articulated the hope that still inspires U.S. leaders:

We have this America not because we are of a particular faith, not because our ancestors sailed from a particular foreign port. We have our America because of our common aspiration to remain free and our determined purpose to achieve for ourselves, and for our children, a more abundant life in keeping with our highest ideals.⁶

As new leadership comes to power in 2009, they would do well to remember that U.S. foreign policy represents our “highest ideals.” Our leaders cannot disentangle the values of the global common good from the national security and foreign policy of our country.

Endnotes

1. Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 101.
2. "Cities Take Lead on Environment As Debate Drags At Federal Level," *Washington Post*, June 9, 2007, p. A1, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/08/AR2007060802779.html>.
3. "Senate Passes Energy Bill," *Washington Post*, June 22, 2007, p. D1, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/21/AR2007062101026.html>.
4. Tom Daschle is a national co-chair of the One Vote '08 campaign.
5. This story is recounted in David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), pp. 541–2.
6. Speech by President Harry Truman at a Conference of the Federal Council of Churches, March 16, 1946, available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=12599>.

“Many often deride the influence of values and religious beliefs in the making of U.S. foreign policy as irrelevant or not in the ‘national interest.’ This couldn’t be further from the truth. *Pursuing the Global Common Good* tells us why.”

Madeleine K. Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State
and author of *The Mighty and the Almighty*

“American foreign policy has been at its best when it linked our national interest to an engagement with the global common good. Our religious traditions are at their best when they challenge us to find realistic ways of engaging the world that are true to our moral commitments and our values. At a moment when we badly need creative thinking, *Pursuing the Global Common Good* is exciting because it suggests steps that are, at once, right, practical and visionary. By suggesting that there can be such a thing as a ‘common good’ in world affairs, this book will help open the debate we need.”

E. J. Dionne Jr., syndicated columnist, Senior Fellow
in the Governance Studies Program at the Brookings
Institution and author of the forthcoming book, *Souled
Out: Renewing Faith and Politics After the Religious Right*

“Our deepest beliefs and religious traditions tell us to respect all humanity and seek justice and peace on earth. Why, then, would we separate our highest principles from the activities of our representative government? By demonstrating how moral vision can have a concrete impact on policy, *Pursuing the Global Common Good* makes a convincing case for a U.S. foreign policy that lives up to our highest ideals.”

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action
Center for Reform Judaism

Center for American Progress

