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A Multilateral Moment: A New US Foreign Policy?

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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0qw2s3n8>

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Publication Date

2010-04-19

Supplemental Material

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Paul Schroeder presents a historical argument for the declining possibility of wars between the world's great powers. In large part this new era of peace is generally a success story rooted in practical experience, historical knowledge and institution building since the Concert of Europe. He also contends that the history of US foreign policy has largely been successful though not as commonly asserted. The US was largely a "rent-receiving state", in the international system, before taking on a role as a "rent-paying state" following World War II. Schroeder concludes that the US must continue to play a vital role in global affairs and not turn inward especially based on a false and myth-based history.

General Wesley Clark maintains that the Obama administration has effectively deployed itself in the realm of domestic politics to begin to rebuild US social capital in the international arena. Obama's appointment of Republican-leaning men to critical foreign policy and defense positions within his administration has squelched potential criticism from opponents. His adept policy decisions have also followed a pattern of moderate reorientation to blunt hostilities that might have emerged by taking more bold positions noting that all policy-making is a matter of politics. Clark turns to analyzing these policy changes as well as the challenges the US faces including Afghanistan, Iraq, Eastern Europe, Israel and Palestine, as well as climate change and nuclear proliferation. He finds that the 16-month-old administration has shifted from a largely unilateral to a multilateral approach of pursuing its national interest. He endorses Schroeder's call for a continued rent paying US in the international system but also fears domestic forces that could push for a diminished US presence in global politics.