Security Matters: The Reconstruction of the ‘New World Order’ in American Foreign Policy.

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Published online: 15 May 2014.

To cite this article:


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Abstract
This article explores the construction and reconstruction of ‘new world orders’ as a dominant narrative framework in American foreign policies. While several scholars have made productive inroads to investigating how this terminology has shaped US security agendas and actions, it is suggested that how we conceptualise the language of the ‘new world order’ is in need of constant updating. Adopting a critical constructivist framework, this article examines how competing conceptions of ‘new world orders’ have been framed in the past and present. It is argued that by sketching the continual reconstructions of ‘new world orders’ it becomes possible to examine how ‘old’ and ‘new’ world orders interact, overlap and even collide to create fault lines in national and international affairs. One of the biggest intellectual challenges advanced here is to reaffirm the tensions and complexity behind an axiomatic part of the lexicon of US security matters.

Introduction
Examining past, present and even emerging security agendas of the United States illustrates that the terminology of a ‘new world order’ has been an enduring narrative shaping how this country understands and responds to the world around it. This language has long been an intimate bedfellow to foreign policy agendas, ranging from isolationism to engagement, containment to deterrence, liberalism to traditionalism, democracy promotion to war, interdependence to unilateralism, amongst many others (Walt 2011; Powell 1992). Evidently these sets of beliefs are multiple and varied. However, studying the different narrations of new world orders constituted in and by US foreign policy agendas one can easily mistake this vision for an already accomplished project. Commonly, the language of a new world order is employed to describe the successful construction of vast institutional edifices created to promote and protect American security interests. Terms such as ‘Pax Americana’, ‘manifest destiny’, ‘hegemon’, ‘America unbound’, ‘US supremacy’, ‘American exceptionalism’ and ‘benign empire’ reinforce ideas of an impregnable US fortress destined to lead the world (Catley 1997; Cox 2004; Daadler and Lindsay 2003; Ignatieff 2003; Jervis 2003; Kaplan 2005; Kupchan 1998; Lobel 2000; Mabee 2004; Mead 2002; Pratt 1927; Skidmore 2005; Walt 2005).

Perhaps these powerful frames ensure that the language of a new world order remains amongst the most legitimating catchphrases within US foreign policy agendas. Although geopolitical landscapes and security environments have changed throughout the ages, this term remains very much in use today. As President Barack Obama remarked, “I believe in

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American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism” (Rove and Gillispe 2012). Whether by accident or design, Obama’s statement appeals to core tenets of the new world order framework long employed to identify and protect America’s core security objectives. Akin to his predecessors, Obama remains avowedly devoted to advancing his country’s self-interests and maximizing its powers in international affairs.

Reflecting on the continuity of the new world order narrative within US foreign policy is intriguing. Indeed, it forces us to ask why this language is still being used today if older ‘new world orders’ no longer exist. How does a term that was employed to describe and pursue foreign policies of yesteryear remain relevant today? A simple answer to these questions is American power. Accepting this logic, the reason why the language of ‘new world orders’ remains in use is because as the world’s sole superpower, the US continues to dictate the terms of the debate. Accepting this logic further, so long as the narrative of a new world order enhances American self-interests, it will continue to be heard in national and international affairs.

While acknowledging that self-interest plays a primary role in shaping what matters to and for American foreign policies, this article takes a step back to unpack what is fast becoming an axiomatic part of current debates. Rather than accepting the ‘new world order’ narrative as a fait accompli, or America as its sole architect, it contends that this language represents a space for and of persistent reconstruction. Without denying that the US remains an extraordinarily powerful actor, careful attention is paid here to show its agency is always contextually bound and thus ‘situated’ within and by different world order frameworks at different points in time (Bevir and Rhodes 2010; Dunn 2005). Adopting a critical constructivist approach, this article showcases that old and new world order narratives are not static phenomenon. Conversely, they represent and constitute never-ending processes of interaction. Importantly, portraying the language of a new world order as a reconstructive project exposes and transcends the binary of old versus new world orders. Although variations exist across the range of attempts to create new world orders, these narratives also overlap and interlink. As we shall see, hints of reconstruction are visible not only from one President to the next; but also as each President’s tries to pursue their vision of a new world order to protect US security matters.

The remainder of the article is set out as follows: the first section discusses the added value of adopting critical constructivism for theorising reconstructive processes; the article then provides a historical backdrop to the ‘new world order’ narratives in US security matters. While acknowledging this language has rich historical roots, the next three sections place greater onus on deciphering how this language was employed during the post-Cold War era to the global war on terror (GWoT). This focus is justified because the two different Bush administration’s foreign policies are often held as manifestations for the beginning and the end of a particular new world order in US security agendas. Using reconstruction as our tool of critical inquiry allows these liminal timeframes to be reviewed. The last section shifts focus to consider the new world narratives being advocated by President Barack Obama at present. Reflecting on security agendas that look set to matter most in American foreign policy reinforces that there is no definitive end point or unitary vision of ‘a new world order’. Rather, what we find is a series of competing and contested understandings about what security means for the US and how it should be attained.
Constructing and Reconstructing New World Orders

Security is a leading theme within the discipline of International Relations (IR) and the source of much debate. Aware of this complexity, many scholars argue that security represents an essentially contested concept, and, as such evades singular definition (Buzan 1991; Connolly 1991, 1993; Gallie 1955-1956; Fierke 2007). This conceptualisation finds parallels with the central tenets of critical constructivism within international relations theory. Decisively, and from each perspective, security is understood as a social construction that is constantly made and remade through processes of interaction. To paraphrase Nicholas Onuf and Alexander Wendt, security ‘is of our making’ (Onuf 1989) and ‘what states make of it’ (Wendt 1992).

Outlining reflexive critiques of rationalism and positivism, constructivists of all stripes contend that security cannot be theorised as something predetermined by material structures, such as anarchy or war. Instead, they stress that security is co-constituted in and by intersubjective exchanges between agents and structures (Adler 1997; Checkel 1998, Guzzini and Leander 2006; Kratochwil 1989; Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986; Wendt 1992, 1999). Highlighting these relations of mutual coexistence and dependence enables constructivist scholars to reinforce the constant potential of unintended consequences, complexity and surprise as agents make choices within different spheres of action. Subsequently, critical constructivists explore not just why change happens, but also how change becomes possible (Doty 1993).

Two key critiques levelled against constructivism are that it oversimplifies the potential for transformation on the one hand and yet represents a form of pure voluntarism and idealism on the other. Put succinctly, the constructivist critique implies, “that we can construct any social world simply by wanting it” (Guzzini, 2000: 155). Such shortfalls finds further expression in claims that constructivism does not address issues of power (Williams 2007) and, far more problematically, may actually propagate ‘a false promise’ (Mearsheimer 1994-1995). With these considerations in mind it is important to reaffirm two points here. First, although constructivists explore avenues and patterns of change, they never suggest that change is easy or guaranteed. Instead, a recurring theme explored throughout their studies is how deeply embedded, internalised and reified cultures, rules, norms and identities can become (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Kubálková, Onuf and Kowert 1998; Klotz 1995; Zehfuss 2002). Taking these insights seriously demonstrates that, “ideas do not float freely” (Risse-Kappen 1994) or instigates automatic change. The second point that stands out in constructivist accounts is that while agents can always exert some form of agency, they are never free to act as they please or without any constraints. Even the most powerful actors are limited by shared intersubjective understandings and pre-existing contexts. As we shall see momentarily, “Presidents are passing through a history that they did not make but can influence” (Jones, 2007:39). The core point to take away is that construction and reconstruction operate in dialectical and interactive relationships, which, in turn, are enabled and constrained by various contextual backdrops.

Since its arrival on the scene of IR, constructivists have begun to conceptualise reconstruction in different ways. Most noticeably, this field has splintered internally along conventional and critical fault lines (Hopf 1998). A core impetus behind this division was a call to create a more ‘consistent constructivism’ by merging a social ontology with a social
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epistemology (Balzacq 2010; Fierke 2007). For critical constructivists this merger has a dual purpose. On the one hand it provides them with an escape route from the scientific straightjackets worn by Alexander Wendt and other early constructivist theorist (Katzenstein 1996). On the other hand adopting a ‘consistent methodology’ offered pathways to reaffirm language as an inherent feature of social life (Onuf 1989, Kratochwil 1989, Fierke 1996; Smith 2000). This turn to language is infused with the spirit of reconstruction. At heart, critical constructivists not only explore how language games and speech acts help and hinder in the construction of intersubjective knowledge and understandings (Debrix 2003; Donnelly 2013; Fierke 1996). Unlike post-structuralism, which focuses predominantly on the deconstruction of power relationship constituted in and by difference and discourse, reconstruction paves the way to explore how intersubjective meanings attain and retain meanings at different points in time. This last point does not suggest that a mutual incompatibility exists between post-structuralism and critical constructivism. What is does suggest is that adopting reconstruction as an analytical tool provides one way of examining the language of a new world order as opposed to another. Specifically, it allows us to investigate the range of meanings that different US Presidents have ascribed to new world order narratives and how these meanings have altered over time.

The Historical Backdrop of ‘A New World Order’

Pinpointing the precise genesis of a new world order is difficult. Ambiguity surrounding the origins of this terminology arises from the fact the ‘new world order’ is never actually made anew. Rather than emerging from a vacuum, or arriving as a fully formed product, different narratives of new world orders represent an evolving project. Not only has this discursive framework reacted to world events, it has also been the site of contestation and thus reconstruction.

Historically, the tenets of a ‘new world order’ can be traced back to the foundation of the United States in 1776. At the end of the war of independence against the British, American leaders embarked on a quest to reconstruct their country as a powerful nation that could protect its internal and external borders at all costs. The US Constitution, formally ratified in 1790, and Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address on 19 November 1863, act as important keepers of this legacy (Lambert 1909). Likewise, Ronald Reagan later remarked, “a nation that cannot control its borders is not a nation” (Greffenuis, 2012: 8 February). While the belief that strong sovereign borders equated to greater security for America was fairly straightforward, it did not translate neatly into practice. Heated discussions between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson over American obligations to France during the French Revolution in 1789 (Lang 1985), and decades later the bloody civil war that raged between 1861 and 1865 (Bestor 1964) both represent sites of contestation over what security meant for America and what kind of ‘new’ order was required to protect them. These debates continued as America rapidly grew into a continental power, stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific (LaFeber, 2008: 46). In the pursuit of overseas markets and profits the US increasingly began to be swept into world affairs, including two world wars in 1914 and again in 1939. At the dawn of these events significant dilemmas re-emerged about where to draw the line between engagement and what
President Jefferson termed “entangling alliances abroad” (Gardner et al. 1976: 56-65). Such considerations were imperative to ensure that US security stopped at the water’s edge as George Washington had recommended (Lang 1985). As we shall see below, concerns about these fault lines have emerged many times since.

New World Order 1945 Onwards

In 1945 the core security objective guiding America was to pave the way for lasting peace. Speaking for himself and other Americans, Henry Kissinger commented they, “were determined that we were going to base the postwar period on good faith and getting along with everyone” (cited in Leffler, 1984: 346). After two world wars, however, US security outlooks under President Franklin Roosevelt and other Cold War presidents were not predicated on hope alone. Rather, they were fixated on creating a robust model of global governance that would create stability and prosperity. The creation of the United Nations (1942-1945), Bretton Woods Agreement (1944), The World Bank (1944), The International Monetary Fund (1944), The Marshall Plan (1947) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (1949) all exemplify American ambitions to reshape the world in these directions (Berdahl 1933; IMF 2013). Faced with the difficult task of formulating a foreign policy after WWII, Truman held fast to core tenets of Wilsonian liberalism but also added a twist: along with enlisting the support of its allies to promote multilateral relations, he sought to ensure that no other great power emerged to rival the United States. The ability of communism to endanger the frontiers of American defense initiatives remained a central preoccupation. It is in this light that the National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68) laid out plans for American security strategies to be geared towards a strategic armament race and a policy of containment (Casey 2005). Such concerns and polices were also laid out in George Kennan’s ‘Long Telegram’ and famous Mr. ‘X’ article (see Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992; Wright 1976).

Examining US foreign policies throughout the Cold War shows a series of constant reconstructions as different Presidents fought the Soviet enemy. Tensions between the US-USSR increased, and then eased, only to increase and then ease again. The alarming diagnosis of the communist threat presented in the NSC-68 appeared to be confirmed by Korean War in 1950 and the Vietnam War in 1955 (Hallin 1986; Hixson 1988; McNamara 1995). Heightened security threats flared up again during the Bay of Pigs in 1961 and more acutely during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. While the latter episode pushed President John F. Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to the brink of nuclear war, it also served to lessen tensions between them (Chomsky 2012). In essence, the Cuban Missile Crisis unforgivingly underscored that the Cold War consensus of containment through nuclear armament was unattainable in the long run. Making this plain in 1963 Kennedy remarked,

“for, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future. And we are all mortal” (Kennedy, 1963: 10 June).

The hotline established between the Kremlin and the White House after the Cuban Missile Crisis and later the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty were sturdy stepping stones taken in 1963 towards establishing peace “in all times” in the “face of total war” (ibid).
While the two blocks maintained adversarial relations, attitudinal changes towards deterrence and détente continued for the remainder of the Cold War (Litwak, 1984: 1). Foreign policy gears accelerated towards détente even faster when Mikhail Gorbachev became the Soviet leader in 1985. While President Ronald Reagan initially pursued a coercive strategy toward the Soviet Union through massive arms build-up, including his Star Wars Defense Strategy, he proved to be a key architect in bringing the Cold War to a close (Fischer 1997). Needless to say, Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost and perestroika, Reagan’s reconstruction of US foreign policy away from antagonism towards rapprochement and the end of the Cold War were extremely unexpected but profoundly important breakthroughs to allow the next new world order to come into existence.

Reconstructing US Security Strategies in the post-Cold War Era

The rise of America to the status of a sole superpower denotes a defining feature of the post-Cold War era. For many, the defeat of Communism signified both the beginning of ‘a long peace for America’ (Gaddis 1986) and the end of history (Fukuyama 1993). With the Cold War apparently ‘won’, the creation of a new world order became a major stimulus steering American foreign policy and George H. W. Bush’s presidency. As Anne Marie Slaughter states,

“many thought the new world order proclaimed by George Bush was the promise of 1945 fulfilled, a world in which international institutions, led by the United Nations, guaranteed international peace and security with the active support of the world’s major powers (Slaughter 1997: 183).

Central to our discussion is that the language of a new world order coined in the emerging post-Cold War landscape masks the huge uncertainties and insecurities faced by the United States and the rest of the world at that time. While the transition from a bipolar to unipolar world order afforded President Bush with opportunities to solidify American power, it also posed a host of new challenges for him to address (Krauthammer 1990-1991).

To begin with, America’s future role within the new world order was not immediately clear, and instead the absence of any serious rival to America’s military, economic and socio-political prowess pushed the boundaries of its national interest to their limits (Rice 2000). Secondly, the language of a new world order espoused by George Bush Sr. contained a significant blind spot: the security environments that existed for decades did not evaporate instantaneously. On the contrary, the incoming administration found it extremely difficult to shake off outstanding security matters they inherited from the Cold War. As Brent Scowcroft, the then National Security Adviser later remarked, “when the Cold War began to collapse in 1989 and things started to break down, it created a tremendous problem for us, especially with German unification coming up” (Scowcroft, 1999). In hindsight German unification proved a relatively minor security matter when compared to the conflicts that sprung across Europe and further afield once the Cold War ended (Anderson 2000; Hermann 1991).

It is also worth noting that, despite the buzzword, the construction of a new world order was not the primary objective foreign policy of this president. Instead, domestic policies and economic recovery overshadowed any foreign policy objectives to create a new world
order. The high spending of “Reganomics’ left behind massive budget deficits, which climbed
to $230 billion in 1990 (Young and Kent 2004: 654). This deficit made it extremely difficult for
the Bush administration to achieve the grandiose campaign of reconstructing a new world
order. Rather, behind this bold narrative frame, they constantly attempted to create an era of
peace but also keep, “the dangers of disorder at bay” (Miller and Yeti 2001: 60).

While the 1990-1991 Gulf conflict provided the launching pad of a new world order, it
also exposed the fault lines mentioned above. Setting out America's security objectives after
Iraq invaded Kuwait, President Bush Sr. stressed,

“The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move
toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times, our fifth
objective -- a new world order -- can emerge: a new era -- freer from the threat of
terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace

A dominant foreign policy picture this administration and US media conveyed about the Gulf
conflict was that it represented a clear victory of American leadership and its supreme military
capability (Hurst 2004; Iyengar and Simon 1993). However, narratives of outright triumph are
tenuous (Biddle 1996). First, any examination of victory in this case must factor in, “the
inequality of both the military and the legal positions of the two sides” (Roberts, 1993-1994: 135). Second, while the US military intervention into Kuwait in 1991 signalled that America was
willing to use offensive measures to quash international security threats, it soon became very
apparent that they had no concrete strategy. Recalling the night before the invasion, President
Bush Sr. stated,

“I must confess that my mind was on other things than Iraq[...] there were other
pressing foreign troubles catching my attention as well, such as the hostage taking
in Trinidad and the tragic civil war in Liberia, in which Americans were in danger”
(Brands, 2004: 115).

Apart from a lack of planning at the outset, significant ambiguities in the Bush
administration’s new world outlooks cropped up at the end of this conflict (Barnett 1996-97). Decisions taken to not march on Baghdad or to remove Saddam Hussein from power were
extremely controversial, both at the time and following the events of 11 September 2001 (Yetiv
2004).

Reconstructing a New World Order under Clinton: Democratic Enlargement or
Selective Intervention?

Several of the security agendas constructed by President Bush Sr. were modified and further
developed by his successor, President Bill Clinton. Indeed, some argue that the newly elected
administration varied very little from their predecessor in the first months in office
(Wolfowitz 1994). Without denying the connection points between the two Democratic
presidencies, it is erroneous to overlook the extent to which Clinton and his staff pivoted their
security strategies towards ‘democratic enlargement’ and ‘democracy promotion’ (Russett,
Layne, Spiro and Doyle 1995; Brinkley 1997; Diamond 1992). As then assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Anthony Lake remarked, “The successor to a doctrine of containment must be a strategy of enlargement -- enlargement of the world’s free community of market democracies” (Lake 1993).

Perhaps the most explicit reconstruction that occurred under the banner of ‘enlargement’ was that interventionism became reclassified as a driving force of American security strategies rather than an auxiliary add-on. According to the 1999 National Security Strategy for a New Century,

“human rights and democratisation became classified as areas where it may serve American vital interests to respond to, relieve or restrict the consequences of human catastrophe” (1999: 2).

Switching humanitarian intervention to the driving seat of US security strategies not only served as a blueprint for subsequent foreign policy events. It also challenged the cornerstones of state sovereignty, and, by extension, what had previously mattered most to US security. Here again we see reconstruction at work, albeit in a more limited form than many suspect. Among the frequently overlooked aspects of the Clinton administration’s security strategy are the explicit connecting points they created between their policy of ‘democratic enlargement’ and pre-existing worldviews. When studied carefully, their security strategy denotes a clear attempt to merge new and old world order visions. As Lake emphasised,

“these dynamics lay at the heart of Woodrow Wilson’s most profound insights [...] Indeed, most Presidents who followed, Republicans and Democrats alike, understood we must promote democracy and market economics in the world -- because it protects our interests and security; and because it reflects values that are both American and universal” (Lake 1993).

Starting with Somalia, several further reconstructive dimensions are visible in Clinton’s foreign policies. Whereas President Bush Sr. had envisioned the intervention in this African conflict as a very short-term project, this administration sought to extend the US operations in the Somali conflict as a linchpin for, “pioneering ‘assertive multilateralism’ and efforts at nation-building” (Bolton, 1994: 56). Images of dead American military personnel being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu were a powerful impetus spurring Clinton to revise and reconstruct his original plan of action in October 1993 (Rose 1998). Aware of the negative impact that an outright American defeat would have at home and abroad, the US initially sent extra troops to the region as part of a sustained peacekeeping mission. As Clinton stressed,

“Our leadership in world affairs would be undermined at the very time when people are looking to America to help promote peace and freedom in the post-Cold War world. And all around the world, aggressors, thugs and terrorists will conclude that the best way to get us to change our policies is to kill our people. It would be open season on Americans” (Broder, 1993).

While the language of an overt ‘cut and run’ was publicly avoided, all American troops were evacuated from Somalia within a six month timeframe.
After this foreign policy failure and military defeat, President Clinton was overtly hesitant to get bogged down in any other peacekeeping missions (Heinze 2007). Noticeably, the volume on humanitarian intervention as the means to promote and protect American security interests was lowered thereafter. To fill this gap, Clinton and his team had to reconstruct the boundaries of the ‘new world order’ they had originally advocated. They retained the language of democracy promotion, but ushered principles of state sovereignty and selective engagement in through the back door. This reshuffling of priorities sheds some light on why the Clinton administration did not intervene in Rwanda to stop the mass killing of the Tutsi tribe by Hutus in 1994. While the scale of mass genocide was being reported by the Secretary General of the United Nations and other experts, the Clinton administration originally downplayed the scale of violence and mass killing (Burkhalter 1994-1995; Lewis 1994). In fact, evidence exists to suggest that America and others, including the UN, would not to refer to the conflict as an ‘act of genocide’ to prevent calls for action that they were unwilling to take (Jehl 1994 a).

The American response to the Rwandan genocide left the Clinton administration open to huge criticism of selectivity, bias and disinterestedness in the face of grave human suffering (Dallaire 2004; Dunne and Wheeler 2004; Jones 2001; Luttwak 1999). Evidence that such condemnations had an impact is found in their willingness to provide US military assistance alongside NATO and UN forces when the Bosnian conflict broke out in 1996 (Hehir 2006; Hansen 2006). Speaking after NATO had reached its decision to intervene in this conflict zone, Clinton stressed, “we clearly have a humanitarian interest in helping to prevent the strangulation of Sarajevo and the continuing slaughter of innocents in Bosnia” (Jehl 1994 b). This oscillation back towards humanitarian principles reinforces continual reconstructive processes operating in US foreign policy. Nevertheless, undertaking foreign policies explicitly in the name of humanitarian intervention and “saving strangers” never gathered the same momentum that they had before Somalia (Wheeler 2002). As then Secretary of State Madeline Albright reflected later on,

“it is one thing to expect a soldier to risk life and limb defending his or her homeland. It is another to expect that same soldier to travel halfway around the world and perhaps to die while trying to quell a struggle over diamonds, oil, or ethnic dominance on someone else’s home turf” (Albright, 2003:20).

The Bush Doctrine, a Global War on Terrorism and Pre-emptive Self-Defense: Reconstructing a ‘New New World Order’?

The failures of Clinton’s security agendas emboldened George W. Bush to claim that America would conduct its security matters on an ‘ABC’ (anything but Clinton) policy (Cooper 2007). As a presidential candidate in 2000, George W. Bush plainly commented, “Maybe I’m missing something here. I mean, are we going to have some kind of nation-building corps from America? Absolutely not” (The Washington Times, 2008: 7 April). Following the contested 2000 election, the incoming Bush administration faced tremendous strategic challenges. However, apart from the Chinese Spy Plane incident in April 2001, his foreign policies were ‘humble’ and centered toward defense modernization (Cook 2002; Greenstein 2002; Allen and
Ratnesar 2006). This focus had to be dramatically revised in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 (Leffler 2003). Incorporating reconstruction as a tool of inquiry helps to explain the puzzle of how a president who came into office so openly opposed to nation building ended up undertaking military action in Iraq to instigate regime changes in Afghanistan and Iraq. It also reinforces that what matters to and for American security are not static goals but constantly evolving projects.

Overall, the Bush administration’s response to the 2001 terrorist attacks, frequently known as the Bush Doctrine, was to fight a global war on terror. Retaining a critical constructivist viewpoint here is paramount to reinforce that the Bush administration’s ‘war on terror’ is not an axiomatic term but a social construction (Croft 2006; Holland 2009; Jackson 2005). Put succinctly, this terminology did not exist readymade. Nor was it guaranteed to succeed as a security strategy that legitimated extensive and exceptional polices which would, “not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated” (Bush, 2001: 20 September). As Robert M. Entman argues calling, “the post-9/11 policy a ‘war’ was a contestable but effective framing choice” (Entman, 2003: 416). By adopting this language Washington solidified its promise to fight those who had planned and executed the attacks, as well as any state that harboured terrorists. The President Bush and his top advisors declared that, “every nation, in every region, has a decision to make. Either you are with us or with the terrorists” (Bush, 2001: 20 September). Whilst this ‘black and white’ binary between an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ represents a particularly strong characteristic of this Bush administration, it is important to acknowledge these ‘othering’ identity constructions are deeply embedded in previous US national and foreign policies (Campbell 1993; Connolly 1993; Doty 1993; Laffey and Weldes 2008). Reagan’s characterisation of the Soviet Union as an ‘Evil Empire’ is just one example. Interestingly the ‘neo-conservative’ outlooks that took precedence in the Bush administration following the terror attacks have been likened to ‘neo-Reaganite’ agendas (George 2005; Kristol and Kagan 1996; Monten 2005). Comparisons have been made to suggest that this Bush administration has been following his father’s foreign policy footsteps, or, attempting to create, “a new new world order” (Drezner, 2007).

While the roots of the Bush Doctrine may be located in the past, it is essential not to downplay the level of reconstruction informing how the White House pursued its foreign policies from 11 September 2001 onwards (Boyle 2010). Evidently President Bush and his team repeatedly argued, “this will be a different kind of conflict against a different kind of enemy” (McInnes 2003). In order to defeat this ‘different kind of enemy’ the Bush administration adopted a policy of pre-emptive self-defense. The contours of this concept were set out most explicitly in the 2002 National Security Strategy which states, “in the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action” (The White House NSS 2002: Preamble). An essential reconstructive facet underpinning this strategy was that it redefined the traditional understanding of pre-emption. Whereas just war theory stipulates that a security threat must actually be imminent to legitimate this mode of action, the Bush administration asserted that it was the possibility of the threat emerging, and not its actuality which counted (Rigstad 2007; Shue and Rodin 2007). Rather than waiting for a ‘mushroom cloud’ to form, that is, the Bush administration asserted it would act to eliminate such threats before they materialised (Record 2003). As the 2002 National Security Strategy summarised,
“while the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting pre-emptively (The White House NSS, 2002: 6).

Dictating these terms in the build-up to the Iraq War, President Bush remarked, “at some point we may the only ones left. That’s ok with me. We are America” (Woodward, 2003: 65).

The unrelenting hard-line that the Bush administration took to pursue their policy of ‘pre-emptive self-defense’ were extremely controversial. For many it represented a departure from the longstanding links crafted between US security, multilateralism and international cooperation, and by extension the old ‘new world order’ framework (Cox 2002, 2004; Ikenberry 2004; Dombrowski and Payne 2003; Gaddis 2002; Jervis 2003). Rifts in US-European relations over the Iraq War and the absence of a second UN Security Council mandate are frequently identified as emblematic of this kind of degeneration (Daadler 2001). Noticeably, while almost every country in Europe supported President Bush in his decision to go to war with Afghanistan, only a ‘coalition of the willing’ backed his subsequent decision to invade Iraq (Doig, Pfiffner, Phythain and Tiffen 2007). Support dwindled even further and faster when no weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were discovered by international inspectors in Iraq, negating a central justification for launching Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003. Among other things, the lack of WMD in Iraq fuelled suggestions that 11 September 2001 did not mark any real turning point in American security objectives (Kennedy-Pipe and Rengger, 2006), and that the threat of terrorism itself has been ‘overblown’ (Mueller 2006).

Understanding the US war on terror as a reconstructive process helps to overcome the problematic either/or distinction between big, small or non-existent vicissitudes in US foreign polices after 11 September 2001. From a critical constructivist framework the focus remains on discerning how various kinds of changes (if any) became possible and unfolded. As Stephen Walt correctly noted, although America’s material position and core national interests have not been radically altered after September 11 2001, “what has changed is the priority attached to these different goals” (Walt, 2001/02: 64).

An indisputable shift in the Bush administration priorities after 11 September 2001 was the introduction and implementation of “enhanced interrogation techniques”, “black sites” and “extraterritorial detention centres” in Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere (Borelli 2005). As part of their larger strategy to fight a ‘different kind of war’, President Bush and his legal team redefined the status of and protections for detainees and prisoners of war. The reconstructions that they undertook to amend what they considered to be “quaint” statutes of international laws, such as the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1984 Conventions Against Torture and Other Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, had enormous repercussions (Galchinsky 2013; Goldstone 2005-2006). The creation of a category of ‘unlawful enemy combatants” who were not granted habeas corpus amongst a host of other legal protections is but one outcome of the Bush administration redefining existing rules (Gill and van Sliedregt 2005). Such actions were further compounded by the interrogation techniques and rendition polices issued from the highest echelons in the Department of Defense and beyond (Hersh 2005; Greenberg, Dratel and Lewis 2006). The horrific pictures that emerged in April 2004 documenting the abuse of detainees being held in US custody at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq catastrophically tarnished America’s image and jettisoned the legitimacy of their security strategies. While the Bush administration categorically denied the use of torture as an
authorised practice of US security strategies, and vociferously condemned the Abu Ghraib abuses, this scandal forced them to publicly reconstruct the modus operandi of their war on terror and the 'new new world' they instituted (Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston 2006; Hamm 2007). Concrete evidence that innocent civilians were subjected to clandestine interrogations which were “tantamount to torture” at the hands of American soldiers also resurrected the fault-line of how to limit but retain US power.

Barack Obama: Reclaiming the Past or Changing the Future?

On 4 November 2008, President Barack Obama was elected as the 44th President of the United States on the promise of change (Obama 2007). However, closer inspection of the current President’s security agendas reveals that he is not seeking to build a radically new world order. Instead, the primary focus of his administration during both terms in office has been to reconstruct the new world order framework that existed before his predecessor and America’s leading role in it (Kagan 2010). For instance, during his inauguration Obama clearly articulated, “starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America” (Obama, January 21: 2009). The 2010 National Security Strategy institutionalised this reconstructive agenda further, declaring the focus would be on, “renewing American leadership so that we can more effectively advance our interests in the 21st century” (The National Strategy Forum Review, 2009: 1).

The same sentiments are at the heart of Obama’s foreign policy agendas. Here, the new world order framework is allied with a broad conceptualisation of multilateralism and, more explicitly shared responsibility (Napolitano, 2011: 27 January). Since taking power, this presidency has persistently claimed that the US will continue to lead the world. In tandem, the White House has also stipulated that this leadership role can only survive if and when others nations actively participate in alleviating established and emerging security risks. The 2010 National Security Strategy summarises this stance in the following way,

"the burdens of a young century cannot fall on American shoulders alone – indeed our adversaries would like to see America sap our strength by overextending our power […] America has not succeed by stepping outside the currents of international cooperation. We have succeeded by steering those currents in the direction of liberty and justice” (The White House NSS 2010: President’s Preamble).

This reconstructive drive has had a profound impact on the precepts of American foreign policy to date. One of the most conspicuous trends currently playing out in US security matters is economic calculi. This is hardly a surprise or even new (Ruggie 1982, 1997; Nye 1995). As noted earlier, the quest for economic markets and profits has fuelled America’s desire to engage in and with new world orders for an extremely long time. Where contemporary economic calculations appear to be parting company with their forebears is that they are permanently driving how the US is operating at home and abroad. To date, a blend of extensive economic awareness and caution has been heralded as the recipe for America to succeed in any future world order. Making this plain from the outset, Obama commented,
“Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age [...] Less measurable, but no less profound, is a sapping of confidence across our land; a nagging fear that America’s decline is inevitable” (Obama, 2009: 21 January).

Preventing this decline has meant an end to outlandishly expensive security budgets pursued during the Bush Administration’s ‘global war on terror’. It has also spurred Obama to wind down the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although the root motivations behind the withdrawal of US forces from both warzones are complex and debatable, at some level, moves in this direction represent another element of a foreign policy aimed at locking in economic security. For example, the 2013 US budget states,

“The Department of Defense (DOD) is aligning the military forces to address the challenges that are outlined in the recently released comprehensive strategic review of defense strategy, resulting in a planned long-term reduction in the total number of military personnel” (Office of Management and Budget, 2013: 38).

This type of downsizing may make financial sense, but suggests that America foreign policies are shifting to security ‘lite’ outlooks rather than unbound engagement.

Such trends arose during the 2011 Libyan intervention. As the Arab Spring gathered momentum across the Middle East, President Obama and his team openly applauded the mass displays of people power (Roberts and Garton Ash 2009; Dadush and Dunne 2011). What remained amiss was American willingness to lead the international community in an effort to stabilise the region. Even after the UN Security Council issued Resolution 1973 authorising ‘all necessary measures’ to protect Libyan civilians, Obama held fast to a policy of limited intervention (UN Resolutions 1973). His reasoning was clear,

“of course, there is no question that Libya - and the world - will be better off with Gaddafi out of power [...] But broadening our military mission to include regime change would be a mistake [...] To be blunt, we went down that road in Iraq [...] But regime change there took eight years, thousands of American and Iraqi lives, and nearly a trillion dollars. That is not something we can afford to repeat in Libya” (Obama, 2011: 28 March).

The reluctance portrayed by the Obama administration in the Libyan operation finds parallels in the American response to the unfolding crises in Syria and the Eurozone monetary issue. While America has repeatedly claimed that the use of chemical weapons in areas surrounding Damascus on 21 August 2013 crossed the ‘red line’, President Obama has not taken any military action against President Bashar al-Assad’s regime (Baker, 2013: 4 September). While armed intervention was floated as a potential response to the chemical weapon attacks, this plan was later retracted. This reconstructive switch first came to fruition under the deal America and Russia brokered in September 2013, under which Syria is required to surrender and destroy their entire chemical weapons arsenal. At some level, this path towards dialogue instead of force fits neatly with the diplomatic impulses beating throughout this administration’s foreign
policies. Deliberations on the Syrian issue are also necessary given the high stakes implications that international intervention would entail. Yet, as the recent Geneva II talks poignantly confirmed, brokering international discussions and ultimatums alone will not suffice in alleviating the tremendous security dilemmas occurring inside Syria and beyond. Patterns of direct diplomatic input coupled with indirect abstinence are also visible in the Obama administration’s response to the Eurozone crisis. Aware of massive ripple effects that the collapse of the Euro would have on an already weakened US market, Obama has actively encouraged European deliberations in order for a solution to be found. Nonetheless, he has consistently maintained that America, “can prod, advise, but only they can make decisions” (Armitstead and Waterfield 2013).

Another noticeable reconstruction informing the current administration’s foreign policy agenda is Obama’s call for a ‘nuclear free world’. Speaking in Prague on 5 April 2009 he stressed,

“So today, I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. I’m not naive. This goal will not be reached quickly -- perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence. But now we, too, must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change. We have to insist, “Yes, we can” (Obama, 2009: 5 April).

At first glance the idea of a nuclear free world symbolises a major U-turn in decades of security thinking. However, it is important not to get carried away. Firstly, Obama’s policy denotes a vibrant reconstruction of pre-existing steps in this direction at the end of World War II and the Cold War. Secondly, Obama’s vision of a nuclear free world is not premised on America giving up all their nuclear weapons (Perkovich, 2010: 7 April). Instead his push is for gradual but concrete benchmarks towards a nuclear free world order. Finally, a return to critical constructivism reminds us that Obama’s ambitions are not guaranteed to succeed. Even taking note of the longevity of his nuclear free policy into account, the simplicity of this catchphrase should not mask the complexity of the security stakes. On the international front Iran and North Korea remain serious impediments to achieving this goal. Contrary to Obama, both of these countries view vibrant nuclear programmes as a help rather than a hindrance to their security objectives. That said, it is worth reflecting briefly on big game changes and more subtle processes of reconstruction at work in US relations with Iran and North Korea surrounding nuclear weaponry.

Iran

Up until a few months ago the US, alongside its European allies, was pursuing a tough policy of sanctions on both Iran’s energy exports and ability to trade and operate its financial system. During this timeframe the Obama administration communicated in clear terms that “all options are on the table” and Tehran faced serious consequences for its continued obstinate and uncooperative behaviour, including their unwillingness to allow UN nuclear inspectors to visit certain sites in February 2012 (BBC Middle East, 2012: 22 February; Cordesman, Bosserman, Khazai and Gold 2012: v). Iran on the other hand continued to portray it nuclear
advancements as peaceful nuclear goals, under the slogan “nuclear energy for all, nuclear weapons for none” (Tehran Times, 14 August 2011).

Against this backdrop, the interim deal that America and the international community brokered with Iran on 24 November 2013 is a huge breakthrough. Despite mutual mistrust, both countries have opted into a six month agreement in which Iran will halt the development of its nuclear programme in exchange for limited sanctions relief (Cousins 2014). This benchmark certainly represents a springboard for launching more ambitious progress. Nonetheless, reconstructions are almost guaranteed to occur as the complex negotiations continue to unfold. As one spokesman said, “now the difficult part starts” (cited in Falasiri 2013). A particularly problematic a fault line that America is going to have to navigate in its special relationship with Israel. Indeed President Obama’s willingness to enter these negotiations with Iran could end up contradicting his previous claim that, “our commitment to Israel’s security is unshakeable (Obama, 2011: 19 May). With Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu openly calling the interim deal a “historic mistake” (cited in Falasiri 2013) serious questions have to be asked about the likelihood of America making progressive inroads in the already faltering Israeli-Palestinian peace process. These entangled agendas highlight the contestability of security matters and how these interactions can transform.

North Korea

The nuclear situation in North Korea and Pyongyang paints another hotly contested security scenario. In December 2012 the world was rattled when North Korea conducted its third nuclear test and launched a satellite into orbit. Such actions were openly condemned by the UN Security Council as a violation of the sanctions imposed on North Korea (BBC Asia, 2012: 14 December). Elsewhere US National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vietor concurred that, “this action is yet another example of North Korea’s pattern of irresponsible behavior” (Time US, 2012: 12 December).

Standing alone, North Korea’s nuclear programme is certainly a security concern for America. Going forward, it may gain even greater significance if the Asia-Pacific region remains a top priority for President Obama. While China’s rise has been peaceful thus far, a competition motif re-emerged following President Obama’s visit to Australia in 2011 where he stressed that, “reductions in US defence spending will not - I repeat, will not - come at the expense of the Asia-Pacific” (Obama, 2011: 17 November). This statement is noteworthy since it underscores one of the few areas where Obama is willing to invest rather than withdraw US security funds. Indeed, during this visit he also announced plans to station a full US Marine task force in Australia by 2016. Such sentiments were echoed in his 2012 State of the Union address where he said,

“I will go anywhere in the world to open new markets for American products. And I will not stand by when our competitors don’t play by the rules. We’ve brought trade cases against China at nearly twice the rate as the last administration - and it’s made a difference” (Obama, 2012: 24 January).

The emphasis Obama has put on packaging America as an Asian power raises questions about existing hotspots existing in US-Sino relations (Christensen, 2006: 85).
influence of Taiwan, alongside China’s development of drones, poses pressing questions about the region’s future stability. Most recently, China’s decision to announce an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) has sparked animosity in US-Sino relations. With the ADIZ, China intends to control a particular airspace above the disputed islands, known as the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China (Lewis and Ackerman, 2013: 3 December). Moves in this direction can easily be interpreted as a response to and blowback from Washington’s ‘Asian Pivot’ (White 2013: 21 December). To date, the US stance on the creation of the ADIZ has teetered between confrontation, by flying two B-52 bombers through this zone, and active compliance with Chinese requests. This contradictory stance is partly be explained by the large amount of US Federal Reserve Debt China now controls. It also fits well with the security ‘lite’ stance noted earlier. Either way, Obama is going to have to come up with significant diplomacy and caution in order to execute his plans to become an Asian power.

Looking ahead, several pressing security matters are set to preoccupy President Obama’s engagements in the existing world order. At the time of this writing, issues ranging from addressing the reverberations of the National Security Intelligence (NSI) scandals to the closure of Guantanamo Bay prison to conducting limited drone warfare in Pakistan, Yemen and beyond will all require enormous amounts of time, attention and diplomatic skill. Obviously this list is neither exhaustive nor fixed, and the Obama administration must tackle complex, multifaceted and unpredictable security matters. Adopting a reconstructive agenda may help this administration embark on, “making this a year of action” (Obama, 2014: 28 January).

**Conclusion**

By turning attention to the reconstructive dimensions of a ‘new world order’, this article has posed what might be several important contributions to existing debates about US foreign policy and security matters. Firstly, adopting a critical constructivist lens reinforces that the axioms of American security are neither self-evident nor path dependent. Examining the various and varying reconstructions of ‘a new world order’ aptly exemplifies that America does not have a unified or unitary security objective. Instead, US security matters can and do oscillate in response to events taking place at home and abroad. At a deeper level, tracing how different narratives of new world orders have evolved demonstrates that such changes arise from on-going contestations over what security means to different US presidents and how they are enabled and constrained to put these meanings into use. Secondly, using reconstruction as a point of departure provides novel insights into the inherent links that exist between the past, present and future ‘new world orders’. Going even further, it breaks down the problematic boundaries so often drawn between old and new world orders. To be sure, the commitment to fostering new world order has waned, yet a noticeable theme this article has unearthed is that references to the past are often an essential feature of depicting, framing and selling new world orders to different audiences. Being more aware of these nodes of overlap and intersection has the potential to help us explain both for big game changes but also subtle transformations in US foreign policy. From a reconstructive viewpoint, no simple black-and-white judgement of President Obama’s economic calculi and diplomatic initiatives is available.
at this time. What does standout is that his foreign policies and any new world orders will continue to constantly evolve.

Acknowledgements
The author would like to thank Mary Jane Fox for reading a revised version of this paper at very short notice and the two anonymous referees at the Journal of Global Fault Lines for their comments on the first submission. Any faults are my own.

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Security Matters: The Reconstruction of the ‘New World Order’ in American Foreign Policy
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