

Summary of Key Points from Brief Presentations and Discussions: The Edmonton Roundtable on Trends in U.S. Foreign Policy

April 12, 2001

**The Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development and
the University of Alberta**

Edmonton, AB, Canada

On April 12, 2001, the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, in partnership with the University of Alberta (Edmonton), organised a roundtable on Trends in U.S. Foreign Policy. The roundtable was the third in a series of discussions taking place in the U.S. and Canada over a three months period (San Diego - March 20, Washington - April 2, Toronto - May 18, Halifax - TBD, Denver - TBD). Canadian thinkers and officials addressed:

- 1) isolationism/engagement and unilateralism/multilateralism; U.S. administration/Congress,
- 2) defence/strategy,
- 3) trade, energy and environment.

Among the participants were Andy Knight (University of Alberta), Alex Moens (Simon Fraser University), Brian Job (University of British Columbia), and Carolyn James (University of Calgary). Peter Moore (Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development) and Blair Bobyk (U.S. Relations Division) attended from DFAIT.

I. Isolationism/Engagement and Unilateralism/Multilateralism; U.S. Administration/Congress

- According to the doctrine of US exceptionalism, the US sees itself as qualitatively different from other states. America therefore believes it can be exempted from certain norms, or rules of conduct, in particular instances. Elements of exceptionalism have been an historical undercurrent in US foreign policy.
- The alternative to unilateralism for the US is not multilateralism in the traditional sense, but rather the formation of select groups of strategic allies (in which the US remains the dominant player) in order to deal with specific issues or crises. The US will seek coalitions to garner moral weight for their actions abroad. As a key architect of the structural foundations of the modern international system, Americans will remain committed to multilateralism as long as it continues to serve their purposes.