

spect, no one doubts the contribution that the Americans tried to make at the Conference of Versailles in 1919: the famous Fourteen Points of President Woodrow Wilson. After World War II, the Americans made an extraordinary contribution through the creation of the Bretton Woods Institutions, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations.

At the same time, it is nonetheless regrettable that the United States has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court and the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel mines. We must recognize, however, that no country in its time of predominance has ever readily accepted limitations on itself in a multilateral arena. Furthermore, one can only note with irony that, when Americans act internationally, they are charged with being arrogant unilateralists; yet, when they decide not to intervene, they are accused of egotistical isolationism!

The United States, however, continues to have a choice between coercion and persuasion. If they use force—military or other—in a manner that is deemed to be too willing or eager, they will almost certainly succeed in the short- to mid-term. In the longer term, however, they would likely face a growing number of hostile states or groups. This is, of course, both an undesirable and likely unsustainable route.

The alternative, of course, is to use a more subtle approach, which relies less on military and economic might, but more on international leadership based on consensus, and on their solid values that have had such extraordinary appeal to so many on all continents. Accepting this approach would mean that Americans would have to accept not having their way every time and everywhere.

In the longer term, however, this “softer” approach would likely earn increasing respect and the goodwill that accompanies genuine respect. I often tell my American friends that they must not go around the world gaining their way by sheer force of their “might”. It must be tempting, given their undeniable predominance, but with great power comes great responsibility.