

# FPIF's First Decade: A Bold Collaboration and Vision

By Erik Leaver and FPIF Staff

While some analysts predicted that the fall of the Soviet Union would bring “the end of history” it was clear by the mid-1990s that this was not the case. Military conflicts flared across the globe. The rise of the global economy highlighted the inequities between states. History, at least as it related to pitched battles over ideas and power, had not come to an end. The question soon arose, what role should the U.S. have in shaping the post-Cold War era as the dominant superpower, both economically and militarily?

In the fall of 1996, two organizations joined forces to answer this question: the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) located in the heart of Washington just a few blocks from the White House, and the Interhemispheric Resource Center, now known as the International Relations Center, (IRC) nestled in the southern mountains of New Mexico.

The result was the birth of Foreign Policy In Focus—a new type of collaboration made possible by the emerging Internet, a joint project between two geographically distant organizations.

Breaking down the barriers that separate so many civil society organizations, IPS and the IRC worked together to forge what has now grown to a vibrant network of more than 600 experts and analysts a decade later.

In its first proposal funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, FPIF articulated its future mission:

*“For too long, progressives have been identified more by what they criticize about U.S. foreign policy than by their views on how international affairs should be managed. The left has been clear about what kind of military intervention, democratization support, development aid, multilateral lending policies, and trade policies it rejects but less clear and coherent about what kind of U.S. foreign policy it can stand behind.”*

*FPIF will provide timely information and analysis about U.S. foreign policy issues together with recommended reforms or alternatives and synthesize the research and writings of other foreign policy experts and institutions as part of a comprehensive vision of what a more just and effective U.S. foreign policy should be.”*

Over the last decade, FPIF has sought to fulfill this vision. We’ve used all of the tools of the trade to get our message out: published award-winning stories; produced reports read by millions through republication; put FPIF materials on the map for government leaders, military officials, educators and grassroots leaders; and appeared on top news programs. And over the next decade we will build on this proud tradition by adding new elements such as video, audio, wiki’s and other collaborative



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tools to advance a new foreign policy agenda and engage new audiences.

## Early Vision and Action

Less than a month after the launch of FPIF, co-director Tom Barry at the IRC penned FPIF's first brief, "Protecting Human Rights." A decade later as the U.S. continues to waiver on the issue of universal human rights, Barry's words still have great relevance:

*"The lack of a coherent, consistent HR policy undermines U.S. credibility as a global leader and constitutes a major obstacle to the improvement of HR conditions internationally. Insistence on respect for HR should be fundamental to an enlightened foreign policy that seeks long-term international stability."*

*--Tom Barry, "Protecting Human Rights," FPIF Brief 1, October 1996*

The project grew at a frantic pace after this first brief, producing 50 policy briefs within the first three months, culminating in the publishing of a book in January 1997, *Global Focus: A New Foreign Policy Agenda 1997-1998*. A signal of things to come, the contributors to the collected volume included FPIF's current co-directors, John Feffer and Emira Woods.

*Global Focus* grappled with defining the U.S. role in the world. In the introduction, FPIF co-directors Tom Barry (IRC) and Martha Honey (IPS) along with IPS' director John Cavanagh wrote:

*"There is no question that the U.S. has a major role to play in shaping the global political, military, and economic environment... The key question is whether this role will be shaped in a short-term, unilateral, and competitive fashion or whether it can be transformed into a longer-term, multilateral, and cooperative approach."*

*--Global Focus, 1st Edition (January 1997)*

Drawing in over 100 writers and consultants into the project, the project began to coalesce as a "think tank without walls." Barry and Honey noted the nature of what the project was building in the acknowledgements in the second edition of *Global Focus* published in February 2000:

*"The common wisdom is that producing an edited volume is more grueling than writing a book from scratch. This has not been our experience. With first hand experience as both authors and editors, we note one striking difference: writing is a solitary and often lonely occupation, while editing involves lots of human contact and interchange... As editors we found our exchanges with the chapter authors both personally enjoyable and intellectually stimulating."*

*--Global Focus, 2nd Edition (February 2000)*

Tapping the analysis from members of its network, FPIF also began to play a crucial role on the ground within social movements during this time. Confronting issues of global economic integration, FPIF sponsored panels, provided grassroots organizing materials, and helped mobilize grassroots for three major events of the decade: "The Other Economic Summit" organized around the 1997 G8 Summit held in Denver, the 1999 WTO Summit in Seattle, and the 2000 World Bank/IMF protests in Washington DC.

FPIF's ability to cover issues both in depth but also in breadth, also became clear in the first years of its existence as it took on research and organizing in other areas as well. FPIF helped organize writers, analysts, and activists working on Colombia and the drug war into an active working group set up to oppose the Clinton administration's "Plan Colombia." While unsuccessful in stopping the passage of Plan Colombia, the coalition still exists today, illustrating its strength and commitment.

Expanding its network globally, FPIF hosted "The Grassroots Summit on Military Base Cleanup"

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bringing together some 80 representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community base closure/clean up movements in a dozen countries and territories including, the Philippines, Japan, Okinawa, Panama, Cuba, Germany, the United Kingdom, Korea, Iceland, Peru, and the United States (including Puerto Rico/Vieques and Hawaii). Among the results was the crafting of a Host Country Bill of Rights which outlines the underlying principles and the basic tenets of a common set of standards that should govern the U.S. responsibility for cleanup at all of its international bases.

FPIF also was heavily involved in opposing NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo. Writing about Kosovo in "Bombs Away," Barry confronted the dangerous direction U.S. military policy was taking and illustrated the path made possible for the presidency of George W. Bush:

*"The U.S. has squandered the opportunity presented by the end of the cold war to strengthen multilateral capacities for preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution, and peace enforcement. Instead of working to reform and empower the UN and to strengthen inclusive conflict-resolution entities like the Organization of Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the U.S. has chosen to establish itself as the 'globocop' of the new world order. When convenient, the U.S. will exercise its power through the UN, as it did in the Persian Gulf War. But increasingly, as in the current bombing campaigns against Serbia and Iraq, the U.S. has held itself above international law and appropriated the right to define new rules of global engagement. As part of its global policing strategy, the U.S. has decided to relegate the UN to the sidelines and establish NATO as its primary instrument for maintaining regional and perhaps international order."*

--Tom Barry, "Bombs Away," FPIF Brief, May 1999

## Focusing on the Challenges of the Bush administration

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, Foreign Policy In Focus showed its strength and flexibility the network possessed. In the days immediately following the attacks, the project immediately shifted gears to meet this challenge. Literally within hours of the Pentagon attack, after IPS evacuated its office, located just a block from the White House, our staff in Washington began assigning op-eds and working to get press interviews for some of our Middle East, military, terrorism, and South Asia experts. FPIF worked on multiple fronts to develop and disseminate alternative analyses and policy prescriptions that were "realistic and robust," as FPIF Advisory Committee member Michael Klare put it. Yet we upheld our beliefs in finding multilateral, cooperative, and non-military solutions to even the gravest of threats.

While the centerpiece of our "Justice Not War" campaign was media outreach, it was supported by a vast array of publications and other materials including: published analysis by our experts, a widely circulated report titled "A New Agenda to Counter Terrorism" by the FPIF co-directors, strategy meetings with arms control NGOs and peace activists both in Washington and around the country, a weekly forum on terrorism-related issues, and meetings with congressional staff and members.

Just two months after the attacks, FPIF took the lead in organizing a major two-day conference at New York University on "Weapons of Mass Destruction: Post-Cold War Legacies in a Post-911 World." Some 300 people attended the conference, whose centerpiece was a live, transatlantic teleconference with journalists and scientists in Moscow, New York, and Washington.

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And as President Bush launched an ambitious project to consolidate and extend its global control in the run up to the Iraq War, FPIF published in early 2003, *Power Trip: U.S. Unilateralism and Global Strategy After September 11*, a book edited by John Feffer. *Power Trip* charted the new terrain of foreign policy after September 11, but also demonstrated how the Bush administration is building on the policies of its successors. As with other FPIF materials, the book analyzed the probable consequences of U.S. actions across the globe as well as the appropriate alternatives to current U.S. policies. Editor, John Feffer wrote in the introduction:

*“Whatever the lineage of the current Bush policies, however much they represent continuity or change in U.S. foreign policy, they threaten to rip the fabric of the international community and plunge the world into the very chaos that they are supposed to prevent. The power trip that the United States is on, as so many have discovered at home and abroad, is a very bad trip indeed.”*

*--Power Trip (Seven Stories 2003)*

In tandem with *Power Trip* when it became increasingly evident that the Bush administration was preparing for a massive war against Iraq in mid-2002, Foreign Policy In Focus took the decision to rapidly turn significant staff time and resources toward building a visible and broad-based movement to try to stop this war. FPIF helped organize the founding meeting of United for Peace and Justice and provided grassroots education materials for the global campaign to stop the war.

### A Decade Later: Challenges and Opportunities

Since President Bush led our nation to war in Iraq, FPIF has focused much of its efforts on ending the war and bringing the troops home. Our work aims to turn widespread but still diffuse dissatisfaction with the Iraq War into a popular movement demanding not only an end to the Iraq War but a

redirection of foreign policy away from militarism and war and toward peace making, based on multi-lateralism, international law and diplomacy. FPIF's flagship report, “The Costs of War,” is widely seen as a key resource for grassroots and policymakers alike. Our strategic approaches connect the peace movement, military families, undecided voters, local elected officials, and the Congressional Progressive Caucus in promoting alternatives to current administration policies.

But over the past decade, FPIF has kept its breadth as well. Meeting the challenge of the time defined in a post-911 world, FPIF released a comprehensive framework document on terrorism, “Foreign Policy In Focus Task Force on Terrorism: A Secure America in a Secure World” which was the product of a bipartisan task force of 24 people. To launch the report, FPIF organized two debates between John Gershman, former FPIF co-director at the IRC and lead author of the report, and the Heritage Foundation's principal counterterrorism expert. Illustrating the legs FPIF materials have, the report was reprinted in a book: *America and the World: The Double Bind* (Transactions Press).

FPIF took up another other key issue, global warming and addiction to oil in the United States, holding a conference on “PetroPolitics” in 2004. The conference brought together scholars and NGO leaders from the peace, environmental, global justice and international development communities to explore with students and activists how to make the issue of oil a connecting thread for these movements. The conferences' briefing book boldly noted the dangers challenging the U.S. and the globe:

*Our collective addiction to oil is at the root of at least six fundamental issues facing our nation, and our planet today: corporate-driven globalization, global warming, poverty, war, terrorism, and the undue influence of money on the political process.*

*--PetroPolitics briefing book (January 2004)*

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Just as the issue of oil confronts us in so many ways, so to does our military budget. In collaboration with Marcus Corbin of the Center for Defense Information and Lawrence Korb of the Center for American Progress, FPIF formed a Task Force of 18 experts from disparate fields to produce the Unified Security Budget for the United States in 2004, 2005, and 2006. Past media coverage included an Associated Press story on doubts about the ways and means of the war on terrorism. The story ran in an astonishing 1,200 newspapers.

*New York Times* reporter David Unger wrote the following about the report in his article “Our Indefensible National Security Budget,” on September 20, 2006:

*“Last spring, two Washington research groups, the Centre for Defense Information and Foreign Policy in Focus...publish[ed] what they called a unified national security budget.*

*Their budget proposes a \$24 billion increase in homeland security spending and shows how it easily could be paid for by cutting back unneeded or over-funded weapons systems like the F 22A fighter, the DDG 1000 Destroyer and the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and trimming the size of the active duty Air Force and Navy.*

*Overall, the two groups found that more than \$60 billion that could be safely shifted out of the next year’s military budget. That would leave more than \$25 billion to spare, after the homeland security increases, which they would apply to such activities as nation-building, peacekeeping, and alternative energy which also make a vital contribution to America’s national security.”*

Deepening FPIF’s history of working in new and exciting collaborations, FPIF joined with a coalition of five organizations (Africa Action, Enlaces America, Ethiopian Community Development Corporation, and the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities) on an ini-

tiative to engage emergent Latino, Caribbean, and African immigrant-led organizations in substantive foreign policy and economic justice advocacy. FPIF featured writings from immigrant community leaders as well as several pieces by analysts from Latin America and Africa who connected with FPIF through outreach from immigrant-based organizations. In addition, FPIF featured pieces on immigration issues including a piece on the anti-immigrant backlash in NACLA, a profile of Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff that focused on his past and prospective approach to immigration, a policy brief on U.S. immigration policy, as well as a series of profiles on anti-immigrant organizations.

Returning to the area of economic justice that was the hallmark of its work over the first three years, FPIF is working closely with allied organizations to raise awareness of the impacts of impoverished country debts on the United States. Our goal has been to mobilize broader support for debt cancellation among the general public and local elected officials by amplifying the analysis of immigrant community leaders and their transnational perspectives. FPIF and the Institute for Policy Studies initiated a dialogue with groups in the United States and the developing world and then working with these groups, drafted a detailed report on the impact of impoverished country debt on immigration, healthcare, and other sectors in the U.S. This report was used as the basis of economic justice workshops with immigrant community groups in Minnesota, Los Angeles, Oregon, Atlanta, and Washington, DC.

## The Next Ten Years

Over the last decade, FPIF has chronicled and supported the efforts of multilateral institutions and global civil society to design feasible policies to address problems plaguing the world community.

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By both the traditional measure of success—media exposure and insertion into the policymaking process—and a more grassroots measure—FPIF’s close involvement with citizen groups and NGOs—FPIF has achieved notable success. FPIF has become a major force in strengthening and advancing a progressive peace and security policy, and in challenging the current administration’s to retrench foreign policy in the destructive patterns of unilateralism and militarism.

But even with our successes, there is still much work to be done. The Iraq War continues to rage, global financial institutions are in need of deep reform, and the U.S. has failed to become a responsible global leader and partner. New centers of power are emerging creating new challenges. Consider the emergence of Chinese multilateral diplomacy, Russia’s petropolitik, India’s economic leverage, and a new generation of Latin American leadership. Civil society has also gained prominence as “the other superpower.” Accompanying this new multipolarism, however, is the potential for increased conflict in the Middle East, Africa, Northeast Asia, and Central Asia.

International polling suggests that citizens throughout the world expect and demand greater global cooperation to resolve these conflicts as well as pressing issues of poverty, climate change, and energy security. Americans, too, are eager for a new foreign policy, both to prevent a return of unilateralism and to implement an effective alternative. With a decade of experience, FPIF’s network is up to the task of engaging the public, social movements, and policy makers to chart this new terrain. And we will do so in compelling, provocative, and unexpected ways.

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## Foreign Policy In Focus

“A Think Tank Without Walls”

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to “making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner.” For more information, visit [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org).

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**p. 6**

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