

THE GLOBAL POLITICS LAB OF THE CENTRO EINAUDI
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The Global Politics Lab of the Centro Einaudi

In 2003, the Centro Einaudi celebrated its fortieth anniversary. We decided to commemorate the event by looking to the future. With the support of the Compagnia di San Paolo, we thus launched a new initiative, the *Laboratorio di Politica Globale (LPG)*, or Global Politics Lab, coordinated by Fabio Armao and Anna Caffarena.

Right from the outset, the subject of international relations with all their implications – geostrategic, geoeconomic, political, institutional – has served as a point of reference for our research and study activity. Indeed, besides seeking to open up the Italian cultural horizon and informing about the flowers that were blooming on the ‘liberal tree’ – in sometimes very different directions in Europe and the United States – in 1963 the founders of the Centro Einaudi also set themselves the objective of creating opportunities for reflection on and exploration of Italy’s international role and the consequences it had, implicitly or explicitly, for the building of the fledgling Italian republic.

In more recent years, the *Rapporto annuale sull’economia globale e l’Italia* (Annual Report on the Global Economy and Italy), which will be published for the ninth time in 2004, has offered an original analysis – characterised by a special capacity to bring together economic and political-institutional perspectives – of economic globalisation and its impact on our country.

Thus, while being an ideal continuation of the history of the Centro past and present, the *Laboratorio di Politica Globale* also seeks to be innovative, attempting a response to what would appear to us to be the problem of all problems – that of democracy. Democracy *inside* states and democracy *among* states: without harbouring illusions about the redeeming capacity of sometimes nice-sounding buzzwords, we have no intention of cynically giving up the idea of peace as a pursuable outcome for international relations. We also aspire to learn to see this utopia in constructive terms, analysing and proposing concrete policy tools and seeking to broaden the spectrum of important phenomena worth monitoring as much as possible, convinced that threats come from a plurality of players: not just ‘rogue states’ and terrorist networks but



also, for example, the large-scale criminal organisations that carry weight at a global level.

Operationally speaking, in line with institutional and other players operating in an analogous context, locally, nationally and in other countries, the *Laboratorio di Politica Globale* intends to promote the diffusion of internationalist culture and multidisciplinary research into the principal points on the international political agenda. In the meantime, the coordinators of the *Laboratorio* have launched two research projects: the first on *The globalisation of politics and the restructuring of the international system*, the second designed to create a *Data bank on international organised crime*.

It is no coincidence that the *Laboratorio*'s first public initiative was, last November, the organisation of a meeting in Turin on the subject of the relations between Europe and the United States with speeches by Michael Cox and G. John Ikenberry (which may be read in the pages that follow). It is not necessary to stress how crucial the EU-US relationship is for world order: the recent breakdown of the Intergovernmental Conference on the new European constitutional Treaty brought home the importance and gravity of European choices (or failure to make them) in this particular field.

The process of European integration, too, can only be understood against a global background. In fact, while it is perfectly legitimate – indeed necessary considering the scope of the change in progress – to discuss the restructuring of the international order – to do so as if the process will be achieved following the same procedures and in the same environment as in the past is sure to seriously weaken the clarity of the argument. Whether we like it or not, like almost every other dimension of social life, politics has lately suffered the impact of globalisation. Yet the globalisation of politics is still one of the least systematically studied aspects of the matter and discussion concentrates almost exclusively on one question alone: namely, the destiny of the state.

It is not enough to substitute the old term 'international politics' with that of 'global politics' to shirk the obligation to explore the dynamics that globalisation has triggered, especially in the political sphere. The drawing of a full, organic picture of this sphere, to a greater or lesser extent transformed by globalisation, is thus a necessary condition for

useful reflection on the role and quality of politics in the world that is taking shape.

This is precisely what the *Laboratorio* is striving to do: to offer a space to share to all those (not only the initiated and internationalists as such) keen to reason simply and tenaciously on politics in the world to come and the tools that will help us to improve it.

Giuseppina De Santis

Turin, January 2004

The Laboratorio di Politica Globale (LPG) of the Centro Einaudi is coordinated by **Fabio Armao** (University of Turin) and **Anna Caffarena** (University of Teramo).

Chairman of the Centro Einaudi is **Piero Ostellino**, General Secretary is **Angelo Pavia**, Manager is **Giuseppina De Santis**.



Transatlantic Relations from 9/11 to Iraq Crisis – What Crisis?

Michael E. Cox

This talk addresses the impact of 9/11 and its aftermath on that apparently most durable of institutions known as the Transatlantic relationship. Few doubted it would have some impact. However, none could have predicted it would be as great as it now appears to have been; certainly, if some analysts are to be believed, the crisis initially occasioned by 9/11 (and then deepened by Iraq) has not only exposed a great divide between the western and Islamic worlds but brought into question the very idea of the ‘West’ itself.¹ As a number of pundits have pointed out, if America’s enemies have achieved nothing more than dividing old friends they have achieved a very great deal.² Indeed, if one measures the significance of any international crisis by the ability of a particular writer to capture the mood of the age, then it is not without importance that the most quoted author of more recent times has been one who has insisted that the real interests of the United States and Europe are now diverging and the sooner we ‘stop pretending’ otherwise the better it will be for all of us.³ In fact, according to Robert Kagan, Europeans and Americans not only do not share a common view of the world any longer, it is doubtful that they actually occupy the same world at all. From this perspective, to quote Kagan, ‘Americans’ would seem to be (metaphorically) from ‘Mars’ and the Europeans from ‘Venus’.⁴

To explore the current situation – and see how far Kagan has got it right – I have divided the paper into two sections. In part one, I advance the case for optimism, partly because I am not necessarily an optimist myself, but mainly because the optimists put forward a very powerful case. In part two, I will try to explain in a fairly condensed way why

¹ Josef Joffe, ‘Collateral Damage’, *Time*, March 3, 2003, p. 33.

² See ‘How Deep is the Rift?’, *The Economist*, February 15th–21st, 2003.

³ See my ‘Kagan’s World’, *International Affairs*, vol. 79, 3 May 2003, pp. 523–532.

⁴ Robert Kagan, *Paradise & Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003), p. 3.

I think the situation may be more problematic than suggested by those who think that there is nothing to be concerned about, or as one American writer recently put it, why all this talk of crisis is so much hot air.⁵ Let me be clear now lest I be misunderstood later. We are not heading for the sort of rupture that has so often been predicted by commentators in the past.⁶ To this extent we should all beware of crying wolf. Nonetheless, there are, as we shall see, important and potentially disturbing changes afoot which have been exposed, if not necessarily caused, by 9/11. These mean that we cannot any longer assume that old certainties about the Atlantic relationship born during the Cold War, and largely confirmed in the ten year period thereafter, will hold for ever. This will not lead to a break, let alone a drift towards blocs. That is not the issue. What is at stake is the importance of the Atlantic relationship itself. Indeed, I would want to suggest that a new kind of bargain between the Europeans and the Americans is in the making – perhaps every bit as significant as that struck in 1949 when NATO was first established in the shadow of Soviet power, and equally important as that constructed in the early 1990s when the Alliance tried to create a new mission for itself in Central Europe and the Balkans. However, this new bargain will be different in at least one fundamental respect to those which have gone before: it will be much less favourable to Europe primarily because Europe is now far less important to the United States.

① *Crisis: What Crisis?*

There has been so much talk about a Transatlantic crisis, that it is first necessary to make the case for optimism. Below I summarize the arguments normally advanced by those who in spite of everything, still believe that the basics of the Transatlantic relationship are sound: that basically Kagan and the pessimists have got it wrong, and that what unites Europe and the United States is always likely outweigh any differences they might have.

⁵ Antony J. Blinken, 'The False Crisis over the Atlantic', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 3, May-June 2001, pp. 35-48.

⁶ See, for example, *The Trans-Atlantic Crisis* (New York: The Orwell Press, 1982).

a. *Liberal Order*

The most sophisticated and balanced case for optimism has been put forward by G. John Ikenberry.⁷ There is no need to be complacent he suggests, but neither is there any need to panic either. Why? Because a 'new deal' of sorts was struck at the end of World War II which worked to the advantage of both the Europeans and the United States. As a result, the former only had to spend a limited amount on their own defence, the responsibility for which they handed over to the Americans who remained the dominant partner within the alliance. By doing so however they (the Europeans) were given many privileges including American aid when they needed it, access to the US market, a share in global governance, security on the cheap, and the benefits which accrued from the United States underwriting a relatively open, more or less stable, global, liberal economy. In effect, by joining a US-led world system, the Europeans may have given up certain rights; however, the benefits of doing so far outweighed the costs. In the same way, by working alongside the Europeans in a complex of overlapping institutions which limited American options as much as facilitating them, the US made this system acceptable to its friends. In effect, both were winners in a complex set of deals and a nexus of relationships from which the two together derived several obvious benefits. And they have every incentive to maintain the relationship. From this follows a simple but critically important conclusion: namely Europe and the United States will continue to co-operate in the future as much as they have done in the past because the 'deal' they have now is better than any of the theoretical alternatives. Put another way: being mutually supportive and multilateralist is not only the nice thing to do, it is also the smart thing to be.⁸

b. *Realist Truths*

If Ikenberry advances what might be called the liberal case for optimism, implicitly Edward H. Carr puts forward what might be termed the harder realist version. However, even though his premises might be

⁷ G. John Ikenberry, 'American Grand Strategy in the Age of Terror', *Survival*, vol. 43, no. 4, Winter 2001, pp. 19-34.

⁸ This view has also been advanced in capsule form by Jeff Legro in his brilliant essay, 'Terrors in Transatlantia', unpublished paper presented at the Workshop on Transatlantic Relations, Villa La Balza, May 10-12, 2002.



different, his account of world politics still leads to the same benign outcome for the Transatlantic relationship. Carr, recall, expressed the view in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* that serious change only comes about in the basic relations between states when one or more of the states in questions feels dissatisfied with the distribution of power in the international system; feeling so aggrieved they will then seek to change the status quo by one means or another. This could either be through a peaceful negotiated settlement of outstanding issues, or if that fails, then through war. Now if Carr is right (and I very much think that he is) then it is difficult to see why either the Europeans or the Americans would want to alter the current international system in any fundamental sense. Indeed, as 'satisfied powers' their level of satisfaction is more likely to go down rather than up if they tried to alter the status quo. Not only that: as 'have' states in a world where many states have very little, they also share a common interest in keeping things more or less the way they are.⁹

c. *The Necessity of NATO*

In the recent spate of trans-Atlantic grumbling about fellow allies, the focus has been almost entirely on the military side of the relationship and the problems arising because one of the allies – the United States – has in the view of most Europeans at least, far too much hard power for its own good.¹⁰ But this emphasis on power as measured by military technology, laser weapons and smart bombs misses the more basic point about NATO and why it has worked so well in the past and why it survived the end of the Cold War when certain realist experts were predicting its demise. One does not have to labour the obvious. Nonetheless, we do need to remind ourselves why NATO has survived the conditions which gave rise to it in the first place; and the reason is clear: it performs all sorts of essential functions. Very briefly these are to (a) prevent the re-nationalization of foreign policy in Europe; (b) integrate the former communist countries to the East into the larger world order at a more rapid pace than can be done (or has been done) by the EU; (c) ensure adherence to democratic political and liberal economic norms

⁹ See Michael E. Cox ed., Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis: A Study of International Relations, 1919-1939* (New Edition: Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001).

¹⁰ See, for example, Timothy Garton Ash, 'The Peril of Too Much Power', *The New York Times*, April 9, 2002.

throughout Europe as a whole; and (d) allow the United States to exercise leadership in Europe. For all these different reasons – there are no doubt others – NATO will persist. America needs it and so too do the Europeans. One might even go so far as to suggest that if NATO did not exist, then like the old Austro-Hungarian Empire it would have to be invented! However, unlike that unfortunate conglomerate which died a death in 1918, the one created in 1949 is bound to have a much happier future.¹¹

d. Managing Interdependence – Organizing Globalization

No discussion of the Transatlantic relationship would be anywhere near complete without mention of the ‘I’ and ‘G’ words. Suffice to make the fairly obvious point here that there is far more to maintaining world order (even after 9/11) than rooting out international terrorism and fighting the hydra-headed al-Qaeda network. It might sound faintly revisionist to suggest otherwise, but there has been much that has been going on since September 11 which has had almost nothing at all to do with the murky world of Bin Laden. Economic facts might be less interesting than military tales of daring-do in the mountains of Afghanistan, but keeping the capitalist show on the road continues to remain a very high priority – and the show is not going to be kept on the road if the two most important parts of the world economy fall out badly.

e. Fighting Terrorism – Effectively

The final reason why the optimists remain optimistic relates to the longer term fight against terrorism itself. Thus far, the primary focus has been on the ‘war’ in the most literal sense and the potentially problematic impact which this has had (and in the case of Iraq might have) on the Transatlantic relationship. Yet as even the hardest of hard liners in the Bush administration readily concedes, without allies, and without the support supplied by friendly countries, then the long ‘war’ against international terrorism will not be able to be pursued to a successful conclusion. Rumsfeld admitted as much only two weeks after the attack itself. As he put it:

¹¹ William Wallace, ‘Europe, the Necessary Partner’, *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2001, pp. 16-34.

“This war will not be waged by a grand alliance for the purposes of defeating an axis of hostile powers. Instead it will involve floating coalitions of countries, which may change and evolve. Countries will play different roles and contribute in different ways. Some will provide diplomatic support, others financial, still others logistical or military. Some will help us publicly, while others, because of their circumstances, may help us privately and secretly”.¹²

② *The Case for Pessimism*

The reasons for being relatively optimistic therefore would seem to be compelling. The optimists can even use history to bolster their case. Certainly, if we gaze back at the extensive literature on the subject of the trans-Atlantic relationship it is quite fun to see how many books written in the past had the word ‘crisis’, ‘strain’ or ‘divorce’ in their title, and how many of these looked distinctly passé only a few years later when things had (once again) settled down.¹³ For example, let us not forget that the British and the Americans got over Suez. The French and the Americans also managed to negotiate the 1960s and the French leaving NATO. In spite of Carter and Schmidt, Germany and the United States continued to get on fairly amicably. And in spite of Reagan, the Europeans still watched Hollywood films – in ever large numbers it seems! Finally, one might ask: whatever happened to those trade wars? Again, according to the doomsters in the past, with the rise of Europe and the fading of the United States (a common theme well into the 1990s) the two were bound to clash in a head-on conflict for global economic supremacy. Nothing of the sort happened. Instead, the two managed to get on reasonable well: in fact far from moving apart, Europe and the United States became ever more intertwined in terms of investment, trade and membership of world economic bodies.

So what is different and why should we be particularly worried this time? There is of course a simple and well rehearsed answer to this question: essentially that the only thing which held the two regions

¹² Quoted in *The New York Times*, 27 September 2001.

¹³ Jeff Legro cites eight fairly mainstream books written between 1962 and 1992 dealing with the Transatlantic relationship which contained the words ‘crisis’, ‘fading’, ‘end’, ‘tensions’ or ‘troubled’ in their titles. See ‘Terrors in Transatlantia’.

together after World War II was the Cold War. Thus absent the East-West conflict it is inconceivable to think of these two mighty continents working closely together under conditions of anarchy. Hence the growing sense of alienation in the post-Cold War era. Other factors have further contributed to this: in short order, the passing of an older generation who were united in adversity during World War II and the Cold War; changing demographics in the United States and the decline of a largely European influenced American elite; and the widening values gap between the two continents as exemplified (say) in the apparent popularity of the death penalty in the US and its prohibition in Europe. Many would also point to Europe's more friendly social democratic form of capitalism compared to the Darwinian version presumed to exist in the United States.

No doubt, all of these are important issues and play into the debate. But ultimately I am sceptical whether they will in the end determine the fate of the relationship. Which leads to the obvious question: so what is the problem? And why all the fuss now? Five factors, I suggest, have made for a more complicated relationship since 9/11 (and even before) and will continue to do so into the future. Again, I will simply deal with these in brief rather than develop each point in detail. I begin with September 11 itself.

i. *The Experiences of 9/11*

“What Europeans don't understand is how much America was changed by September 11”.¹⁴

Perhaps the most obvious cause of the current 'crisis' is 9/11 itself. Put concretely, 9/11 has been experienced very differently in the United States and Europe. Naturally, much could still happen to change all this, especially if Europe itself was to come under attack. However, for anybody who has lived in Europe but travelled to the United States since the end of 2001, it is difficult not to be struck by the gap in mood and understanding. The simplest measure of this is the fact that most Europeans outside of the military and the intelligence services really do not think we are at 'war' in any serious way. Americans, to put it bluntly, do. More generally, the world has changed for the United States in many meaningful ways – at home as much as abroad. It has not changed so

¹⁴ *International Herald Tribune*, February 16–17, 2002.



much for the Europeans however. For most Europeans, the modern war on international terrorism means little more than (occasionally) taking off one's shoes at the airport and waiting a little longer at borders. Furthermore, 9/11 has reinforced America's sense of its own exceptional character. Indeed, it is significant that whilst Americans after September 11 engaged in a thoroughgoing review of what it meant to be American in a hostile world, most Europeans were almost bemused by what they regarded as this rather odd outburst of sentimental patriotism. From afar it all looked faintly bizarre. Some Europeans, I suspect, were even downright scared – not to mention turned off – by the sight of all those American flags and the repeated chanting of 'USA, USA, USA' whenever Bush appeared. And there is more. America has responded to 9/11 by raising military spending and strengthening homeland security: the Europeans, basically, have done neither. The United States also now sees the world almost entirely – but not quite – through the prism of fighting international terrorism. For Europeans, as François Heisbourg has observed, it is almost 'business as usual'.¹⁵ We might formulate the issue in another way: that whereas September 11 was a truly historic event for the United States and for the future conduct US foreign policy,¹⁶ it was not historic for Europe. As Garton Ash has put it, 'this is yet another defining moment at which Europe declines to be defined'.¹⁷

ii. *Where the Threats Are*

"The ongoing pace of military operations in Afghanistan and the escalating violence in the Middle East serve to underscore the fact that the basic security challenges of our day no longer lie within Europe but outside of it. As a result, the trans-Atlantic relationship faces a paradox. We have the most successful Alliance ever created but it is or seems to be marginal or even irrelevant when it comes to dealing with the most urgent issues of the day" (Senator Richard Lugar).¹⁸

¹⁵ Talk. *Oslo Military Academy*, 13 March 2002.

¹⁶ This is the tone adopted by the various contributions to *International Security*, 'The Threat of Terrorism: U.S. Policy after September 11', vol. 26, no. 3, Winter 2001/02.

¹⁷ Timothy Garton Ash, 'Europe at War', *The New York Review of Books*, December 20, 2001, p. 68.

¹⁸ Quotes from 'US Senate Hears NATO Reform Proposals', *Voice of America News*, 5 May 2002.



A second new factor in the Transatlantic relationship concerns the weight which the United States now attaches to Europe as a source of conflict and instability. This represents a major shift from the period of the Cold War when the epicentre of the superpower antagonism ran right through the heart of the continent. To this extent, the Cold War privileged Europe in American thinking; and Europe retained this special status well into the 1990s because of what was actually happening in former Yugoslavia and fears of what might happen in post-communist Russia. But even those twin dangers were to pass: in the end the Balkans were tamed and Russia continued uneasily along its pro-western path. Naturally, this does not mean that Europe has become insignificant, but it does point to the fact that it has lost its once central position in US eyes. To this degree, the Eurocentric moment has passed. This has major implications for NATO. It has also had equally important results for United States grand strategy which has gradually shifted its focus away from the relatively trouble free zone known as Europe, to more pressing regional problems in the Middle East and Asia. It follows that the US has to build up a new kind of force structure to deal with these. It also means that new forms of coalition will be required which might easily have the result of making NATO less rather than more important in the future. This is the critical point. For it will be threats – according to the United States – which will now determine the coalition, not any single established coalition that will determine how to deal with threats. Rumsfeld has made it very plain how he sees the future wars of the 21st century. As he put it in February 2002 in a major intervention that talked quite openly about the advantages of forming ‘floating coalitions’ and the disadvantages of having more rigid forms of military alliance. He remarked:

“To the extent that you have a single coalition, you have to get everyone’s agreement, and the effect of that is to go down to the lowest common denominator. It’s to do the very least that that total group is willing to do, and you dumb down the mission. So my view is you have to let the mission determine the coalition and you don’t let the coalition determine the mission”.¹⁹

¹⁹ Speech, February 20, 2002.



iii. *The Arithmetic of NATO*

“The huge additional investment” (the US) “is making in defence will make practical inter-operability with allies in NATO or in coalitions impossible”.²⁰

There has been so much written of late about asymmetrical wars that one could easily forget that one of the more obvious asymmetries is not just that which happens to exist between weak yet potentially dangerous threats to the major powers, but the enormous power inequalities that now exist – and which are getting bigger by the day – between the United States and the European members of NATO. In an off-the-cuff remark the General Secretary of NATO referred to the Europeans as being ‘military pygmies’ when set alongside the US; the point has also been made at greater length elsewhere.²¹ The crude facts are well known. In essence, the United States spends more on defence (leaving aside other expenditures on national security) than all of the other major countries put together – with room to spare; and this was even before 9/11. Significantly, the \$48bn rise that Bush is now proposing for FY2003 is actually larger than the entire defence budget of any one of America’s European allies. The R & D component of that is also huge: in fact, it is nearly as big if not bigger than the total European expenditure on defence. Moreover, and more importantly, while the trend in defence spending in the US is most definitely on the up, in Europe it continues to fall. Nor is there much political will to increase it, in spite of much anguished advice from the experts to do so. Many would insist (and have) that this really does not matter much. Europe and America – they point out – are simply different types of power. Anyway, it has always been so: so why get too hot and bothered about the power inequality now? Two reasons would suggest themselves: (a) the gap in capabilities is growing not narrowing; and (b) as the gap grows it means that the Europeans will not only have decreased leverage over the United States, but that the US will take Europe less seriously. It is not for nothing, as one analyst recently remarked, that it is becoming increasingly hard for the Europeans to get much respect in Washington these days.²² Indeed,

²⁰ Lord Robertson, *Financial Times*, February 25, 2002.

²¹ Michael Alexander and Timothy Garden, ‘The Arithmetic of Defence Policy’, *International Affairs*, vol. 77, no. 3, July 2001, pp. 509–530.

²² Michael Hirsh, ‘The American View: Europe’s Bark Still Has No Bite’, paper presented at Villa La Balza, 10–12 May 2002, p. 1.

without such capabilities, and a massive boost in them, the Europeans will not even be able to participate in exercises (and wars) involving the United States. As George Roberston, the NATO Secretary General pointed out, there is no use in the Europeans complaining about tendencies in the United States it does not like, unless it is prepared to do something to address the issue of its own limited capabilities. As he put it:

“If we are to ensure that the United States moves neither towards unilateralism nor isolationism, all European countries must show a new willingness to develop effective crisis management capabilities”. Nothing less will suffice, he continued. Thus if the Europeans members of NATO take decisive action then the Alliance as an alliance will have some sort of future as a meaningful military body. However, if they fail to act, then it will become something of a side-show. The choice is thus simple: to do nothing or very little and become increasingly irrelevant, or act decisively and continue to play some sort of role in world affairs.²³

iv. *America or Bush's Retreat from Multilateral Engagement?*

So much European and American ink has been devoted to this particular foreign policy ‘deviation’ that there is little point saying much more here. However, a couple of points do need to be made. The first, quite simply, is that the trend away from multilateralism has been so long in the making that it is perhaps a little unfair to blame it all on Bush. As many analysts have pointed out, though his administration in the first few months turned the habit of offending allies into something of an art form, his immediate predecessors including Clinton were hardly innocents when it came to going-it-alone. This however raises a second question. For if it is true that America’s disenchantment with multilateral negotiations and multilateral organizations is not new – and furthermore that the unilateralist impulse is more a function of changes taking place within and without the United States since the end of the Cold War rather just something to do with the election of a particular administration – then we are bound to arrive at a rather gloomy

²³ Two European experts put it thus: “Simple reliance on the United States is not the answer. Public opinion will not forgive leaders [in Europe] who fail to take adequate measures in the wake of Sept. 11”. See William Hopkinson and Julian Lindley-French, ‘Europe is not ready to respond to new threats’, *International Herald Tribune*, 20 February 2002.

prognosis about the future of the Transatlantic relationship. Indeed, it would help the optimist's case if all the blame could be laid at the door of the current White House team led by the arch enemy Donald Rumsfeld aided and abetted by his hard-nosed crew of intellectual skinheads. After all, if they can be elected into office, they can just as easily be elected out again to be replaced (possibly and hopefully) by a more user-friendly outfit with impeccable multilateral credentials. One suspects however that this is too simple a reading of what might be taking place, and what in fact has happened in the 1990s when a combination of factors – the most important by far being America's growing self-confidence in a world without rival, competitor or serious enemy – inclined it more and more to break free (or steer clear) of the various constraints that others sought to impose upon it. Herein lies the problem for those in the more optimistic camp. For if we are witnessing something bigger and larger than the foreign policy wish fulfilment of a particular set of ideologues who happen to be influential with Bush, then the future for multilateralism and international co-operation (including co-operation with allies and friends across the Atlantic) looks decidedly problematic.²⁴

v. *Visions in Collision*

Finally, we come to competing visions of the world. As the optimists frequently point out, the United States and Europe are bound together by many subtle and not-so-subtle ties. Indeed, one of the more robust optimists has even gone so far as to suggest that 'far from diverging' of late 'the United States and Europe' have been increasingly 'converging' around a common set of economic, political and cultural ideas.²⁵

Perhaps so, but this ignores the equally important fact that the two also have rather different (and increasingly divergent) views about how the world should be best organized. Here there is a very obvious difference, rooted in history, between a Europe which has grown to maturity since the end of World War II by pooling sovereignty, building common institutions, and making laws that transcend frontiers, and a United States which fears the loss of sovereignty, suspects those institutions

²⁴ See my 'Whatever Happened to American Decline? International Relations and the New United States Hegemony', *New Political Economy*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2001, pp. 311-340.

²⁵ Antony J. Blinken, 'The False Crisis Over the Atlantic', *Foreign Affairs*, p. 36.

which it cannot dominate (hence its jaundiced view of the UN), and sees international law as a very real problem limiting what it can and cannot do abroad.²⁶ Moreover, these competing visions of international order seem to have become ever more entrenched on both sides of Atlantic during the 1990s with the result that on many foreign policy issues Europe and the US often find themselves on opposites sides of the table. Not only that. By virtue of the very much bigger role the US performs in the international system, it means that policy-makers in Washington are bound approach any particular problem in ways that are sometimes not to Europeans liking. This is something we have certainly seen 9/11. Indeed, 9/11 has only confirmed what might be termed the ‘American’ approach to world order: basically one that sees the world in the tough realist terms of threats and enemies which have to be contained or defeated. It is hardly surprising that the Europeans have balked at this with the result that the gap between the two has become more pronounced than ever.²⁷

²⁶ One example was in May 2002 when the Bush administration decided to renounce formally any involvement in a treaty creating an international criminal court. See Neil A. Lewis, ‘US rejects global pact on war-crimes tribunal’, *International Herald Tribune*, 6 May 2002.

²⁷ See Steven Everts, ‘The US and Europe: about divisions of labour and how to manage them’, unpublished paper presented at the Workshop on Transatlantic Relations, Villa La Balza, May 10-12, 2002.



Force and Order in the American Unipolar Age

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If the 20th century is viewed as a great struggle between the rule of power and the rule of law among states, the American role in this drama is paradoxical. The United States has been the world's greatest champion of multilateral rules and institutions, but it has also consistently resisted entangling itself in institutional commitments and obligations. Across the century – but particularly at the major postwar turning points of 1919, 1945, and 1989 – the United States has articulated grand visions of rule-based international order meant to replace or mitigate the balance of power and strategic rivalry. No other country has advanced such far reaching and elaborate ideas about how rules and multilateral institutions might be established to manage international relations. Yet, despite this enthusiasm for law and multilateralism, the United States has been reluctant to tie itself too tightly to such an order.

After 1919, the United States put the League of Nations at the center of its designs for world order – collective security and international law were to provide mechanisms for dispute resolution and the enforcement of agreements. After 1945, the United States came forward with a breathtaking array of new multilateral institutions and rule-based agreements – the UN, GATT, IMF, World Bank. After the Cold War, the United States again pursued an ambitious institutional agenda – the expansion of NATO and the launching of NAFTA, APEC, and the WTO. But at each turn, the United States also resisted the loss of its sovereignty and policy autonomy. The American rejection of the League of Nations in 1919, the International Trade Organization in 1947, and more recently the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty are all dramatic evidence of America's reluctance to commit itself to a rule-based international order.

America's deep ambivalence about multilateralism and the rule of law is currently on display in its confrontation with Iraq. In fighting terrorism and rogue states who seek weapons of mass destruction,



the Bush administration has articulated an assertive, go-it-alone-if-necessary doctrine. In the use of force, the United States will seek coalitions of the willing but it will act if necessary without United Nations or alliance consent. The administration's recent National Security Strategy document captures this view on the limits of concerted or multilateral use of force: "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 preemptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country."

America's ambivalence about rule-based order has unsettled world politics. The stakes are high because in the decade since the end of the Cold War, the United States has emerged as an unrivaled and unprecedented global superpower. At no other time in modern history has a single state loomed so large over the rest of the world. But as American power has grown, the rest of the world is confronted with a disturbing double-bind. On the one hand, the United States is becoming more crucial to other countries in the realization of their economic and security goals; it is increasingly in a position to help or hurt other countries. But on the other hand, the growth of American power makes the United States less dependent on weaker states, and so it is easier for the United States to resist or ignore these states. As seen by much of the world, the United States is poised between two alternative worlds: one where the United States continues to build international order around multilateral rules and institutions; and the other where the United States begins to disentangle itself from rules and institutions – reverting to a world of power politics and might makes right.

Why is the United States so ambivalent about an international system of rules and laws? As the United States emerges in the 21st century as the world's preeminent global power, is it likely to retreat even further away from a rule-based order toward power politics? While some American officials want to use American power to resist multilateralism and the rule of law, the lesson of history is that even powerful states – and certainly a unipolar American – are advantaged by supporting and operating within a international system of rules and institutions.



Unipolar Power and Multilateralism

Has the rise of American unipolar power in the 1990s reduced its incentives for operating in a multilateral, rule-based order? In this view, the United States has become so powerful that it does not need to sacrifice its autonomy and freedom of action within multilateral agreements. With the end of the Cold War and the absence of serious geopolitical challengers, the United States is able to act alone without serious costs. If this is so, the international order is at the early stages of a significant transformation triggered by what will be a continuous and determined effort by the United States to disentangle itself from the multilateral restraints of an earlier era. It matters little who is president and what political party runs the government. The United States will exercise its power more directly – less meditated or constrained by international rules, institutions, or alliances. The result will be an international order that is more hegemonic than multilateral, more power-based than rule-based. The rest of the world will complain but they will not be able or willing to impose sufficient costs on the United States to alter its growing unilateral orientation.

Many officials in the Bush administration reflect this view. Multilateralism can be a tool or expedient in some circumstances but states will not want to be tangled up in institutions and rules and they will avoid or shed entanglements when they can. Power disparities make it easier for the United States to walk away from potential international agreements. Across the spectrum of economic, security, environmental and other policy issues, the sheer size and power advantages of the United States makes it easier to resist multilateral restraints. That is, the costs of non-agreement are lower for the United States than for other states – which gives it bargaining advantages if it wants them but also a greater ability to live without agreement without suffering consequences.

The shifting power differentials have also created new divergent interests between the United States and the rest of the world – which further reduces possibilities for multilateral cooperation. For example, the sheer size of the American economy – and a decade of growth unmatched by Europe, Japan or the other advanced countries – means that United States obligations under the Kyoto would be vastly greater than other states. In the security realm, the United States has global interests and security threats that no other state has. Its troops are more

likely to be dispatched to distant battlefields than those of the other major states – which means that it is more exposed to the legal liabilities of the ICC than others. The United States must worry about threats to its interests in all the major regions of the world. American unipolar power makes it a unique target for terrorism. It is not surprising that Europeans and Asians make different threat assessments about terrorism and rogue states seeking weapons of mass destruction than American officials do. If multilateralism entails working within agreed upon rules and institutions about the use of force – this growing divergence will make such multilateral agreements less easy to achieve – and less desirable in the view of the United States.

Sources of Multilateralism

Yet the United States is not structurally destined to disentangle itself from multilateral order and go it alone. Indeed, there continue to be deep underlying incentives for the United States to support multilateralism and rule-based order – incentives that in many ways are in fact increasing. These sources of multilateralism stem from the functional demands of interdependence, the long-term power calculations of power management, and American political tradition and identity.

Economic Interdependence and Multilateralism

American support for multilateralism is likely to be sustained – even in the face of resistance and ideological challenges to multilateralism within the Bush administration – in part because of a simple logic: as global economic interdependence grows, the need for multilateral coordination of policies also grows. The more economically interconnected that states become the more dependent they are for the realization of their objectives on the actions of other states. Rising economic interdependence is one of the great hallmarks of the contemporary international system. Over the postwar era, states have actively and consistently sought to open markets and reap the economic, social and technological gains that derive from integration into the world economy. If this remains true in the years ahead, it is easy to predict that the demands for multilateral agreements – even and perhaps especially by the United States – will increase and not decrease.



The American postwar commitment to a system of multilateral economic rules and institutions can be understood in this way. As the world's dominant state, the United States championed GATT – and the Bretton Woods institutions – as a way of locking in other countries to an open world economy that would ensure massive economic gains for itself. But to get these states to organize their postwar domestic orders around an open world economy – and accept the political risks and vulnerabilities associated with openness – the United States had to signal that it too would play by the rules and not exploit and abandon these weaker countries. The postwar multilateral institutions facilitated this necessary step. As the world economy and trading system has expanded over the decades, this logic has continued. This is reflected in the WTO which replaced the GATT in 1995 and embodies an expansive array of legal-institutional rules and mechanisms. In effect, the United States demands an expanding and ever-more complex international economic environment, but to get other states to support it the United States must itself become more embedded in this system of rules and institutions. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the Bush administration has succeeded in gaining “fast track” authority from Congress and led the launch of a new multilateral trade round.

American Power and Multilateralism

American support for multilateralism can also stem from a grand strategic interest in preserving power and creating a stable and legitimate international order. The support for multilateralism is a way to signal restraint and commitment to other states thereby encouraging the acquiescence and cooperation of weaker states. This has been a strategy that the United States has pursued to a greater or less degree across the 20th century – and it explains the remarkably durable and legitimate character of the existing international order. From this perspective, multilateralism – and the search for rule-based agreements – should increase rather than decrease with the rise of American unipolarity. It predicts that the existing multilateral order – which itself reflects an older multilateral bargain between the United States and the outside world – should restrain the Bush administration, and it suggests that the current administration should respond to general power management incentives and limit its tilt toward unilateralism.



The struggle between the United States and its security partners over how to deal with Iraq puts American strategic restraint and multilateral security cooperation to the test. Governments around the world are extremely uncomfortable with the prospect of American unilateral use of force. The Bush administration insists on its right to act without the multilateral approval of the UN – but its decision to take the issue of Iraq back to the United Nations in September 2002 is an indication that the Bush administration senses the costs of unilateralism. By seeking a Security Council resolution that demands tough new weapons inspections and warning that serious consequences will flow from an Iraqi failure to comply, the United States acted to place its anti-Saddam policy in a multilateral framework.

It is not surprising that the administration – despite its unilateral biases – might be sensitive to these costs. A chorus of voices from the United States and abroad have warned American officials that the costs of unilaterally using force in Iraq would be considerable. Some of the expected costs are practical – if the United States goes in alone it will not have sufficient support after the war to engage in the expensive and long-term process of reconstructing Iraq. The diplomatic struggle at the United Nations over the American use of force in Iraq reflects a more general debate among major states over whether there will be agreed upon rules and principles that will guide and limit the exercise of American power. The Bush administration seeks to protect its freedom to act alone while giving just enough ground to preserve the legitimacy of America's global position and garner support for the practical problems of fighting terrorism. The administration is again making trade offs between autonomy and the benefits that come from gaining the multilateral cooperation of other states in confronting Iraq.

Political Identity and Multilateralism

A final source of American multilateralism emerges from the polity itself. The United States has a distinctive self-understanding about the nature of its own political order – and this has implications for how it thinks about international political order. To be sure, there are multiple political traditions in the United States that reflect divergent and often competing ideas about how the United States should relate to the rest of the world. These traditions variously council isolationism and activism,



realism and idealism, aloofness and engagement in the conduct of American foreign affairs. But behind these political-intellectual traditions are deeper aspects of the American political identity that inform the way the United States seeks to build order in the larger global system. The enlightenment origins of the American founding has given the United States an identity that sees its principles of politics of universal significance and scope. The republican democratic tradition that enshrines the rule of law reflects an enduring American view that politics – domestic or international – are best organized around rules and principles of order. America's tradition of civil nationalism also reinforces this notion – that the rule of law is the source of legitimacy and political inclusion. This tradition provides a background support for a multilateral-oriented foreign policy.

To be sure, American leaders can campaign against multilateral treaties and institutions and win votes. But this has been true across the last century manifest most dramatically with the rejection of the League of Nations treaty in 1919 but also reflected in other defeats, such as the International Trade Organization after World War II. When President Bush went to the United Nations to rally support for his hardline approach to Iraq, he did not articulate a central role for the world body in promoting international security and peace. He told the General Assembly: "We will work with the U.N. Security Council for the necessary resolutions." But he also made clear: "The purposes of the United States should not be doubted. The Security Council resolutions will be enforced ... or action will be unavoidable." In contrast, just twelve years earlier, when the elder President Bush appeared before the General Assembly to press his case for resisting Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, he offered a "vision of a new partnership of nations ... a partnership based on consultations, cooperation and collective action, especially through international and regional organizations, a partnership united by principle and the rule of law and supported by an equitable sharing of both cost and commitment." It would appear that quite divergent visions of American foreign policy can be articulated by presidents – each resonating in its own way with ideas and beliefs within the American polity. If this is true, it means that American presidents do have political and intellectual space to shape policy – and that they are not captives of a unilateralist minded public.

Conclusion

American ambivalence about multilateralism and rule-based international order will not go away. But there are also some limits on how far the United States will move away from such an order. There is a powerful strain of ideological thinking in America that resists the idea of being bound to international rules and institutions. The commanding power position of the United States makes these isolationist and unilateralist ideas more influential. The war on terrorism – which makes the United States feel vulnerable in very new ways – also legitimates these anti-rule based ideas. There is an “imperial temptation” that lurks in the background of American foreign policy. But despite these forces and impulses, the United States still needs an international order that is organized about rules and institutional cooperation. The United States cannot achieve its goals without multilateral agreements and institutionalized partnerships with other states. The great drama of the 20th century will continue in the 21st – namely, a drama where the United States both resists and rediscovers the international rule of law.

