

Realpolitik Challenges to World Peace: Debating the effects of America's Foreign Policy during the early years of the second Iraqi War.

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Introduction

The tragic events of September 11 have had a tremendous impact on the form, yet not on the political and ideological roots of American Foreign Policy. What is already known as the "*Bush Doctrine*" does not necessarily provide new insights on the political principles and ideological premises of US foreign policy, traditionally divided under the influence of four schools: Hamiltonians, Jeffersonians, Jacksonians and Wilsonians. In fact, as this essay tries to demonstrate, the Bush Administration adopted a foreign policy path whose main differences with previous American doctrines are the extraordinary international and domestic circumstances in which this particular administration was forced to operate.

With this in mind, the first section of this paper includes a historical, psychological and postmodern overview on the ideological and political basis over which American Foreign Policy is built. The idea is to demonstrate how the construction and adoption of a particular notion of "national identity" has defined the terms in which Americans develop, promote, enforce and defend their Foreign Policy. The second part will include a critical analysis of US Foreign Policy under the Bush administration. This second section of the paper tries to offer a balanced account between those who saw the Bush Doctrine as a necessary instrument to save the

West by protecting its values, and those who criticized the arrogance and selfishness with which the Bush Administration adopted its most infamous policies. By conducting an effort to understand why the events of September 11 have become such a big deal in the formulation of US foreign policy, part II will also try to offer a general overview on the supposed unilateral effects of 09/11 over the Bush Administration's foreign policy.

Finally, part III includes –as a manner of conclusion– an argument on the need to liberate American Foreign Policy under the Obama Administration, from the narrow political discourse that has found the way to kidnap it. American Foreign Policy must not and should not concentrate exclusively in the so-called “war on terror” or the implications that this “preemptive war” will have on the preservation of America's national security and world peace will be remembered forever. American primacy implies important responsibilities and the world is still waiting for the greatest power to turn its political rhetoric into a precious reality.

Part I. The Origins

American Foreign Policy is at the center of every serious attempt to understand the current political and economic dynamics of the world. The end of the Cold War left the United States as the only great superpower, inviting scholars like Kenneth Waltz (2002, 1996, 1993) or John Mearsheimer (2002, 2001) to conclude that in the anarchic conditions of international relations, great powers' specific weight is what matters most.

Authors like Samuel Huntington also stressed the importance of the US unique role, by analyzing what he decided to call “*US Primacy*” (Huntington 1999, 27). In international relations, primacy is acquired when a particular state has the capacity to shape decisions that affect the world. In Huntington's argument, only the United States possesses the power and the necessary values to support a prosperous, increasingly democratic, and stable international order (Huntington 1999, 28).

But where do these ideas come from? Where can we find the roots not only of Huntington's beliefs but of the realist notion that international relations, ultimately, is about great powers' politics? Several authors have tried to answer similar questions from a historical or a psychological perspective. Others, like David Campbell, have based their arguments on the theoretical framework developed by postmodernism, with the idea to offer an accurate account on the interactive relation between the constitution of identities, the definition of a national interest and the formulation of a particular foreign policy.

An interesting reference to the psychological perspective can be found in a recent article wrote by Gilbert Achcar (2002). While explaining the effects of 09/11 over America and the world, Achcar offers a valuable approach to the notion of superiority within the Western culture. For Achcar, “America and the West suffer of what Freud called ‘narcissistic satisfaction provided by the cultural ideal’. Freud explained such narcissistic satisfaction as follows: “No doubt one is a wretched plebeian, harassed by debts and military service; but to make up for it, one is a Roman citizen, one has one’s share in the task of ruling other nations and dictating their laws” (Achcar 2002, 26).

An ideal example of this narcissistic satisfaction can be found in Tony Blair’s speech during the 2002 Labour Party Conference in Blackpool: “Our values aren’t Western Values. They’re human values and anywhere, anytime people are given the chance, they embrace them. Around these values, we build our global partnership. Europe and America together. Russia treated as a friend and *equal*. China and India seeking not rivalry but cooperation and for all nations the basis of our partnership – not power alone but a common will based on common values applied in an even-handed way” (Zelikow 2003, 21). Overwhelmed and disturbed by these kind of messages, some analysts suggests the idea that America and the West do possess a psychological element that provides them with the notion of pride and superiority, since “they belong to a culture to which not everyone is lucky enough to belong to” (Archar 2002, 26). Too often, Gilbert Achcar argues, “their [Western] ‘humanism’ is nothing more than a masked expression of their own ethnocentrism” (Archar 2002, 27).

If we connect psychological insights like the one offered by Achcar with serious historical approaches to the issue, we might be amazed to discover –as Mary A. Heiss did (2002)– that “the idea that the United States had a special and unique mission, assigned by a higher authority, to remake the world... had existed throughout the nation’s history, from George Winthrop’s ‘City on a hill’ proclamation to the Founders’ conception of the nation as a new Israel leading the world from darkness to light” (Heiss 2002, 520). From the theoretical basis of a historical framework, Mary Ann Heiss offers an interesting insight on the evolution of the Imperial idea and the construction of an American notion of national identity. Heiss suggests that major political events throughout the relatively short history of the United States have influenced this nation’s identity and the process through which American Foreign Policy has acquired its imperialistic, or better said, expansionist nature. After offering a historical analysis of the main US foreign policy doctrines, from the birth of the nation to the final years of the Cold War era, Heiss reaches a remarkable conclusion: “When the nation was weak and lacking in global status, it remained true to the anti-imperial principle, not only because it was part of the nation’s heritage but also –and perhaps more importantly– because doing so served US efforts to consolidate the nation’s position at home and later abroad.

Once the nation had acquired international standing, it seemed to subordinate anti-imperialism to practical geopolitical considerations” (Heiss 2002, 540).

While psychological and historical approaches do deserve, in my opinion, more attention than the one they get from international relations scholars, David Campbell’s de-constructivist approach provides a useful insight on the relationship between national identity and the consolidation of a particular foreign policy. Following Foucault’s postmodern notion of genealogical de-construction, Campbell tries to understand different perspectives of national security while “un-building” notions of identity. For Campbell, identity is constituted in relation to difference and difference is constituted in relation to identity. By avoiding a traditional reading of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, Campbell is capable to conclude that the notion of individual identity, the state and international relations are mutually constitutive. In *Writing Security*, Campbell argues that the state requires a considerable effort to maintain order within and around itself. This effort forces the state to engage in an evangelism of fear to neutralize off internal and external threats, succumbing in the process to the temptation to treat difference as “otherness”. Thus, the constitution of identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries that serve to demarcate an inside from an outside, a self from an-other, a domestic from a foreigner. According to Campbell, what he calls “outside dangers”, have helped to define what it means to be an American. In consequence, the constant articulation of danger through US foreign policy is not a threat to the nation’s identity or existence, but quite the opposite, it is its condition of possibility (Campbell 1999, 289).

Interesting enough, the tragic events of September 11 have brought a new dimension to the “outside dangers” perspective over which Campbell believes American identity is constructed and American Foreign Policy is formulated. After 09/11 outsiders are dangerous not only because they pursue different goals over the basis of a very different morality, but mainly because they represent –more than ever –the incarnated versions of the unknown, the unexpected, the unseen. If as Campbell argues, “foreign policy needs to be understood as a domestic instrument giving rise to a boundary rather than acting as a bridge” (Campbell 1992, 69) then, the events of 09/11 can easily be considered as the perfect excuse to formulate the ultimate foreign policy with which the United States could be able to neutralize off, once and for all, every single external threat.

The risks, then, are evident. After the shocking events of 09/11, the United States can easily succumb to the temptation of treating “the other” –the Afghans, the Iraqis, the terrorists, the immigrants– not only as “dangerous foreigners” but as members of a different, sub-human, category. As a matter of fact, many analysts consider that the treatment received by some Taliban and Al-Qaeda prisoners in Guantanamo, shows already the arrogance of the US government, especially if we compare such treatment with the one received by the “American Taliban” or other

domestic terrorists, like Timothy Macbay. Having proved the dangers intrinsic in “others”, the US government has succumbed to the temptation of treating them as different. If this temptation of “raising barriers” continues to be translated into actions, it could not only harm Americans through an increasing paranoia inflamed by a vicious narcissistic contemplation of themselves, but it will continue to “engender the hatred of many ordinary people... and, as an outlier, the terrorism of a few” (Gilbert 2002, 1).

Part II. The Immediate Past

On his first public reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11, President Bush recognized, at least implicitly, that international cooperation was indispensable for the consolidation of a successful campaign against terrorism. During the following weeks the integration of an international anti-terrorist coalition was at the center of American political objectives. To help organize its retaliation, the Bush Administration approached its NATO allies, carefully reviewed the list of nations that were subjugated to its sanctions, and designed commercial and financial aid programs with the premeditated idea of using them in exchange of cooperation. Yet, as Kenneth Pollack points out, “from the first moments after September 11, there was a group of people, both inside the administration and out, who believed that the war on terrorism should target Iraq, and in fact, should target Iraq first” (Pollack 2002). In “The War Behind Closed Doors”, PBS show, Frontline, traces the inside story of how this group of advisers, calling themselves *neo-Reaganites*, *neo-conservatives* or simply *hawks*, set out to achieve the most dramatic change in American foreign policy in half a century: a grand strategy, formally articulated in the National Security Strategy (NSS)¹ released in September 2002, that is based on preemption rather than containment and calls for the bold assertion of American power and influence around the world (Frontline 2003).

For this group of neo-conservatives, the new National Security Strategy was somewhat provocative, but it was deliberately so. In other words, the National Security Strategy had to be provocative if it was to foster the painful worldwide debate that must occur in order to condition the international community to think hard about these new dangers and about how the cadence of security threats has changed. In any event, hardcore realists like Condoleezza Rice, were very careful to observe that this new strategic approach had to be treated with great caution. Rice argued that the number of cases in which this new Security Strategy might be justified will always be small. “Realism and idealism should not be seen as alternatives”, Rice argues, “a realistic sense of power politics should be used in the service of ideals” (Rice 2000, 33). However, contrary to what she and Bush once argued on the campaign trail about humility and a judicious sense of limits, Rice as

well as some of the most powerful neo-conservatives of the Bush Administration, did believe that America's vast military power should be used preventively to spread democratic ideals (Snyder 2003, 40).

Ironically and perhaps because of the "frankness" of some members of President Bush's cabinet, this administration's foreign policy was perceived by many as radically different from –say– the previous one. The Bush administration insiders who helped define the *Bush Doctrine*, and who argued most forcefully for a war with Iraq, were determined to set a course that will remake America's role in the world (Frontline 2003). On this regard, the comments expressed by the then National Security Advisor in an article written for *Foreign Affairs* offer a shocking example of the Bush Administration political intentions. In her article, Rice appears as a fearless defender of US unilateralism. A unilateralism that she justifies over the tacit assumption that American values could be treated, in fact, as universal values. For Condoleezza Rice, "the aim of the Bush strategy is to dissuade any potential adversary from pursuing a military build-up in the hope of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States or American allies" (Snyder 2003, 40). Her position was so extreme that during the 2000 presidential campaign, Rice often criticized what she considered "the Wilsonian echoes" of President Clinton's Foreign Policy.

For Rice, the idea of having to legitimize and subjugate America's power in the international arena to the statutes and norms established by international organizations, was nothing else but a sign of weakness. "Only those that feel uncomfortable with their power position are able to substitute the 'national interest' for 'humanitarian ones'" (Rice 2000, 34). According to Rice, the implication that the United States can legitimately exercise its power only when it is done in the name of someone or something else, is inadmissible. In sum, although she sustains that there is nothing wrong with actions that benefit humanity, Rice clearly indicates that multilateral and institutional agreements should not be ends in themselves for US foreign policy, but only secondary effects, appearing after the consolidation, preservation and promotion of the National Interest (Rice 2000, 36).

The fact, however, is that right after the attacks of September 11, Secretary of Defense, Colin Powell, and General Henry Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, were determined to rein in the hawks. Powell's argument –that an international coalition could only be assembled for a war against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, not an invasion of Iraq– won the day, and Iraq was put on the back burner (Frontline 2003). Thus, despite the fact that it was forced by the circumstances, the construction of an international coalition against terrorism was seen by many as a valuable step towards a consistent diplomatic cooperation. In short, it was seen as a clear signal that the Bush Administration was genuinely returning to the "safe waters" of multilateral consensus. Nevertheless, eighteen months after the attacks the unilateral decision of attacking Iraq revealed America's

strong links with its immediate past and the arrogance and selfishness of its new grand strategy.

Of course, the personal beliefs of some members of the Bush Administration are not the only reason that can explain the persistence of unilateralism in US foreign policy, as well as the persistence of numerous obstacles to overcome it. From the isolationist tradition of American public opinion, to the never well-controlled forces of globalization, or the military conservatism of some US officials, United States foreign policy has been continuously manipulated by unilateral premises under the shadows of multilateral ones. In fact, for example, we can say that America's public opinion was an essential element of the unilateral belligerent reactions assumed by the US government right after the attacks of 09/11. Thus, if we want to understand why President Bush talked about "infinite justice", we should take in consideration the expectations of a population that, in its vast majority, were scared, offended and humiliated by the terrorist attacks. The American people, educated in the myths of a right to violence in self-defense, were expecting nothing else but "infinite justice".

The issue of globalization as a possible source of American unilateralism deserves separate attention. The debate about globalization and its effects starts with the definition of the term. One of the most perversely oblique definitions establishes a perfect correlation between "globalization", understood as the process of de-territorialization of the decision-making variable (Dahrendorf 2001) and "unilateralism", understood as the extension of US national interests and particular values to the rest of the world (Dahrendorf 2001). To identify the notion of globalization with US unilateralism or to identify globalization –as some authors do– with the "Americanization" of the world, is to restrict the richness and potential of globalization to the power politics game of American foreign policy. Although it may sound strange, the impact that the process of globalization has had over the consolidation of a unilateral US foreign policy is enormous. The apparent contradictions of a unilateral engagement in global dynamics find an obvious justification when we consider the great amount of money and resources that America put at risk every day under the different dimensions of globalization.

Another interesting source that can help us to understand America's chronic unilateralism might be found in the conservative bastions of its military apparatus. As it is well known, the terrible Vietnam experience gave new impulse to the old isolationist tradition. The constant reluctance of high ranked US generals to send military troops even to peace-keeping operations in relatively "safe" regions of the world, might as well be explained by the Vietnam trauma. However, the reluctance of these high ranked officials contrasted with the continuous US interventions and the decision of the last two administrations to station US troops all over the world. The issue, then, is not American involvement in foreign conflicts, but the way in which America gets involved.

With the idea to ensure total control of “America’s destiny” in international military campaigns, and as a reaction to the enormous failure of the US intervention in Somalia in 1993, a new Presidential Decision Directive (PDD 25) was promulgated in Washington regarding the participation of US troops in multilateral operations. This document was elaborated in 1994 following the criteria established by Caspar Weinberger and Colin Powell. According to PDD 25, the United States can participate in multilateral operations, only if these operations are launched under its exclusive control, and only if they count with the support of the American people and victory is guaranteed (Urquhart 1999). In other words, the document proposed an “affirmative multilateralism”, but includes conditions so restrictive that it conduces, instead, to the so-called “coalitions of the willing”.

In consequence, just as it happened during the conflict in the Balkans, Washington promoted the idea of an international peace-keeping coalition, but did not discuss the idea of subjecting its soldiers to the command of a foreign General, especially when it came down to what Washington considered “key military campaigns”. The evidence indicates that US foreign policy has operated lately over the basis of selfishness and unilateral interests. Not one realist would be surprised with the formulation of a foreign policy which main objective would be to serve a national interest traditionally defined in terms of power.

For many analysts and US policy makers, the terrorist attacks of 09/11 have provided one more reason to continue with the same tendency. As explained by James Chace:

“[F]or much of its history, America has sought to secure its political and territorial integrity without the assistance of other powers. This solitary –or unilateral– approach to security has carried with it an implicitly absolute goal: to prevent America’s security from being undermined by the constraints of other powers. Such an approach has brought with it a strong disposition to respond militarily to any perceived threat” (Chace 2002, 21).

Yet, far from bolstering the mechanisms of an international community that the United States helped to create, the Bush Administration did show signs of a dangerous unilateralism, not to mention the gleams of moral superiority that can actually be found in Bush’s Doctrine. 2

The War on Terror helped to reaffirm US foreign policy over its imperialistic and isolationist roots...

“As America continues to ferret out and destroy terrorists who aim to attack the United States... it will do so alone or with ‘coalitions of the willing’. This implies a permanent ‘garrison state’, with American troops acting as international policemen, prepared to attack and destroy any perceived danger to the state –with or without allies” (Zelikow 2003, 21).

The dangers of such unilateral measures are evident. America now finds itself trapped in the agony of an endless war that has demanded and will continue to demand a large amount of economic and human resources, and will inevitably register several casualties. Besides, the need for *pre-emptive* strikes –like the one that was promoted by the Bush administration against Iraq– may turned out to be the source of deepest problems, not to mention the enormous challenges posted today by the need of reconstructing both, Iraq and Afghanistan.

More than eight years after the September 11 attacks, some argue that there is more confusion than clarity about the direction and motives of US foreign policy, while others suggest that the Obama Administration is actually providing American foreign policy of a clear purpose and direction, under the leadership of Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. For the first time since the end of the cold war, many argue stealing Ikenberry's term, a new *grand strategy* is taking shape in Washington, one that does not mean to use America's unrivaled power to manage global order.

From the constant concern of national governments regarding the future of Central Asia, to the voices of prudence and concord elevated by human rights and international peace activists, the so-called "*hawks*" of the Bush Administration not only seemed to ignore all those claims and voices, but they seemed to forget one little detail: After Saddam, what? Today, President Obama seems to know that whatever follows the war in Iraq will be at least as important as the war itself.

Before the invasion, the international community questioned the possibility of a war in Iraq not only in terms of its legitimacy, but in terms of the humanitarian and political impact that such a war could have for the entire region. Sadly, the legitimate concerns of the international community combined with the idea that weak, unstable or authoritarian regimes might constitute a fertile soil for the development of terrorists, especially if these regimes suffer of economic backwardness, has generated today an intense debate between ample sectors of American scholars and policy makers.

The debate, however, isn't new. In fact, this discussion has its origins on what I like to call "the two great consciousness of American foreign policy". Henry Kissinger offers a plausible explanation of these two tendencies. On the left, Kissinger argues, many see the US as the ultimate arbitrator of domestic evolutions around the world. They act as if America has the appropriate democratic solution for every other society regardless of cultural and historical differences. For this school of thought, foreign policy equates with social policy. On the right, some Americans believe – sometimes based on a frivolous interpretation of history– that the solution to the world's ills is American hegemony (Kissinger 2001).

Pulling from the left, “many analysts and politicians have claimed that the September 11 terrorist attacks provided concrete evidence that the United States should incorporate ‘*nation building*’ into its national security strategy as a tool for preventing the formation or continued existence of states where international terrorists can organize and operate” (Dempsey 2002, 415). In other words, this train of thought proposes the idea of ‘nation building’ as the best mechanism to support a national defense. Formed in this tradition, authors like Gary Schmitt argue, for example, that “promoting liberal democratic governance in many of our [American] adversaries’ regimes, is less an idealistic option than a strategic imperative” (Schmitt 2002, 12).

In contrast, pulling from the right, hardcore realists like John Mearsheimer (2001, 2002) or Robert Jervis (1978, 1998, 2002), consider the idea of nation building, as well as the liberal premises over which it is constructed, as highly misleading. The liberal idea of nation building as the best defense “rests on debatable assumptions, such as that poverty and ignorance are the ‘root causes’ of terrorism and that undertaking multiple nation-building missions will significantly reduce the potential for terrorism” (Dempsey 2002, 417). For Jervis, the liberal perspective that finds poverty and inequality as the roots of the terrorist problem is misleading as an explanation for the problem and as a prescription for dealing with it. Thus, to argue that poverty is either a necessary or a sufficient cause of terrorism is as perverse and misleading as to argue that the absence of liberal arrangements is the root cause of terrorism (Jervis 2002). The whole idea of nation reconstruction evidences the return of liberal internationalism. For Mearsheimer, the fact that this time the return of liberal internationalism poses in the realist attire of national self-interest, does not alter its utopian premise: “if only we could populate the planet with good states, we could eradicate international conflict and terrorism” (Mearsheimer 2001, 15; Snyder 2002). A realist approach to combating terrorism, therefore, hinges not on nation building or making the world safe for democracy, but on a policy of victory and credible deterrence (Mearsheimer 2001, 15).

The problem with these realist approaches –which basic premise is to ensure national security through the maximization of power– is that they seem to ignore, once again, the voices of those who claim that national security shall be constructed over the basis of a more pluralistic and humanitarian discourse. For example, in an interesting approach to the notion of Human Security, Seyom Brown considers that the traditional realist prioritization of the national interest disregards the interests of individuals and non-state actors and ignores all that happens “within, above, and across the jurisdictions of nation-states” (Brown 1994, 10). The final purpose of a *preventive doctrine* would be seriously affected if the notion of ‘nation building’ is not considered essential towards the objective to prevent a ‘rouge state’ from launching an attack against America or a so-called ‘failed state’ from harboring terrorists.

Thus, regardless of the intensity with which the debate between these two “consciousness” develop, the need to combating terrorism in the “real world”, seemed to force the Bush Administration to move farther and farther from a healthy balance. Rather than contributing to the consolidation of a moderate synthesis, the concepts emerging from the Bush administration’s war on terror form a neo-imperial vision in which the United States assigned to itself the global role of setting standards, determining threats, and using force. The Obama Administration must realize that such radical ideas could transform today’s world order in a way that the end of the Cold War did not. As John Ikenberry argues, “the Bush administration’s approach was fraught with peril and likely to fail” (Ikenberry 2002, II).

Unexpectedly, the winds of prudence and moderation seemed to be touching the temple of America’s new Commander in Chief. However, as long as Washington continues to show its inability, if not its indifference, to everything that links America with the rest of the world, the United States will be unable to develop the necessary elements for the consolidation of a peaceful and safe international order. Despite the existence of an educated middle class and a continuous civil struggle for the installment of a democratic tradition, President Obama’s goal to withdraw combat forces from Iraq by August 2010 and all remaining troops by December 2011 (NYT 02/27/09) will not only be wishful thinking but a complete disaster in case the official policy towards Iraq and the entire War on Terror does not change soon.

An authentic international community can only be founded over the basis of that which Condoleezza Rice considers secondary: the conciliatory power of international organizations and the regulatory power of international law. Perhaps it is time for America to abandon its harmful arrogance and ridiculous selfishness, as Michael Sherry argues, “humility seems a weak reed against American power and a mushy quality when toughness is needed, but humility and toughness can go together” (Sherry 2002, 637).

Part III. Conclusion

Before 09/11, during the first seven months of his administration, President Bush accumulated affront after affront. Bush offended the international community by rejecting the Treaty of Kyoto against gas emissions, by rejecting the premises of the International Justice Tribunal of Rome and its efforts to legally process war criminals, and by trying to build an anti-missile defense system (Rumsfeld 2002).

This short list of Bush's infamous errors and affronts in foreign policy –by no means exclusive or exhaustive– may show, for some, nothing but a mild liberal criticism. For others, however, these actions comprise just the tip of the iceberg in a long list of atrocities and illegalities perpetrated by the Bush Administration before and after 9/11. The question, then, is not how will America use her power in the post Bush era, but 'how will President Obama overturn such an adverse situation in American foreign policy? The new 'strike first' military policy was simply the most revealing expression of the Bush Administration's determination to follow its own path regardless of the views of long-standing allies (Tucker 2002, 7).

The initial reaction of Washington to the September 11 attacks suggested the need to formulate an American foreign policy over the basis of a multilateral approach. Few months later, however, a 'return' to unilateralism was more than evident. The major critics of the Bush Administration predicted that a "failure to pay proper respect to the opinion of others and to incorporate a broad conception of justice into US national interest, will eventually come back to hurt the US" (Nye 2002, 87). Thus, American advocates of multilateralism agree to indicate that a multilateral US foreign policy under the Obama Administration would be in the best interest of the United States.

Even Realist *gurus* like John Mearsheimer suggest that the United States, first, should not engage in a global war on all terrorists. Second, should place the highest priority on locking up the fissile material and nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union. Third, should emphasize intelligence, diplomacy and covert actions over military force in its campaign against Al-Qaeda. And finally, should adopt certain policies to ameliorate the rampant anti-Americanism in the Islamic World (Mearsheimer 2002, 31). In relation with his last suggestion, Mearsheimer's proposed policies include the massive withdraw of US troops from Saudi Arabia, the immediate end of the occupation of Iraq and the elimination of an unconditional support for Israel. Amazingly enough, even the maximum exponent of the so-called 'offensive realism' advocates for a prudent and more sensible US foreign policy. After all, every suggestion complies with U.S foreign policy ultimate objective: To defend, ensure and promote the United States and its National Interest.

The political debate between unilateralists and multilateralists appears to be purely rhetorical. Perhaps, Tucker is correct when he suggests that the advocates of multilateralism "have often confused form with substance". The problem is that "American foreign policy has never been quite as multilateral as many have imagined" (Tucker 2002, 7). If, in fact, American multilateralism and its efforts to find 'peaceful' diplomatic resolutions to international conflicts have always been founded over the premises of this rhetorical basis, then the unilateralism exhibit by the Bush Administration was in no way different from the unilateralism showed by previous administrations, with the exception of the international circumstances in

which it had to operate, and will not be, in essence, any different from the multilateral approach promoted by President Obama. This, however, does not mean that the selfish unilateral measures of US foreign policy constitute the best option to deal with the exceptional circumstances of current international relations.

While sustaining the idea that “American response to 09/11 did not deflect US foreign policy from its historic purpose, but only more precisely defined and re-energized it” (Schmitt 2002, 13), analyst Gary Schmitt argues that “[I]n the early 1990’s, the question was raised as to whether the United States could ‘return’ to being a ‘normal’ power once the exceptional requirements of the Cold War were behind it. The truth is, [however], that the United States can never be a ‘normal’ power and it invites trouble even when it tries to avoid it. It is rather American ‘exceptionalism’ that is normal, and the *Bush Doctrine* was the most recent manifestation of it” (Schmitt 2002, 13). Schmitt might be right, but what he does not consider is that “America’s exceptionalism offers not only the grandiose face of imperial *hubris*, but also the narrower one of parochial national interest. Any imperial power has to balance its narrow national interest with the interests of the system it leads” (Hassner 2002, 33).

One thing the current Iraqi War has made clear is that a grand experiment of the twentieth Century –the attempt to impose binding international law on the use of force– has failed. As Washington showed, nations do not need to consider whether armed intervention abroad is legal, merely whether it is preferable to the alternatives. The structure and rules of the UN Security Council really reflected the hopes of its founders rather than the realities of the way states work (Glennon 2003, 18). However, reality showed that these hopes were no match for American hyper-power; will the Obama Administration be?

What happens today at the Security Council confirmed a tacit truth: Today, no combination of adversaries can hope to equal America’s power under any circumstances. However, if they fear the unbridled use of America’s power, they may perceive overwhelming incentives to wield weapons of terror and mass destruction to deter America’s offensive tactics of self-defense. Indeed, the history of the myths of empire suggests that a general strategy of preventive war is likely to bring about precisely the outcome that Bush and Rice wished to avert (Snyder 2003, 40).

In other words, for as long as the Obama Administration is unable to find a “fair equilibrium” between US national interests and the interests of the international community, this administration will be incapable to realize that “there is more to hegemony than superiority, more to power than military might, more to terrorism than Al-Qaeda or Islamic fundamentalism, more to the fight against them than ‘war’ in the classical sense and much more to ruling the world, dealing with its

problems and fighting its dangers, than [the dangers that] can be found in the philosophy of American Unilateralism or benevolent empire” (Hassner 2002, 30).

Poverty and ignorance may not be the root causes of terrorism, but that does not mean either that these problems shall continue to be ignored or that they must be addressed only because they indirectly “harm” America and the West. Issues like world health, global warming, illegal traffic of drugs and weapons, environmental degradation, international migration, human rights, economic development, free and fair trade, etc. demand a rapid and efficient attention. The wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world does have a responsibility. Why? Because this nation has the means to accomplish things others cannot. If putting the interest of the international community before the interests of the nation is rejected as an idealistic view, perhaps the Obama Administration shall at least try to find a fair balance among these divergent, yet not necessarily antagonistic forces.

Notes

1. Released September 17, 2002, twenty months after President Bush took office, the 33-page “National Security Strategy of the United States” (NSS) offers the administration’s first comprehensive rationale for a new, aggressive approach to national security. The new strategy calls for pre-emptive action against hostile states and terror groups, and it states that the US “will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise America’s right of self-defense by acting pre-emptively”. The NSS also focuses on how diplomacy and foreign aid can and should be used to protect American values, including “a battle for the future of the Muslim World” (Frontline 2003).
2. It is clear that the Bush Administration, following on the work of its predecessors, was trying to integrate the formal discourse of universal principles into great power politics. In fact, the National Security Strategy states that including the world’s poor in an expanding circle of development and opportunity is a moral imperative, one of the top priorities of US international policy (Zelikow 2003, 21).

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