

**AMERICAN UNILATERALISM**  
**AND THE DOCTRINE OF PREEMPTION**  
*THE CASE OF IRAQ*

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**ABSTRACT:**

The following essay constitutes an effort to provide a “foreign perspective” to the huge economic, political and social implications that any version of American Foreign Policy has and will have for the rest of the world. Far from trying to determine whether US foreign policy should abandon its unilateralism, engage in the democratic development of international organizations, observe international law or pursue more “benign” trade policies, this essay concentrates on the idea that the United States will benefit the most from a Foreign Policy that recognizes itself as the major architect of world politics.

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 has adopted a foreign policy path whose main differences with previous American doctrines are the extraordinary international and domestic circumstances in which this particular administration has been forced to operate.

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 closer view on the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as an instrument to demonstrate not only that American Foreign Policy hasn’t changed that much after 09/11, but also as a tool to account for the dangerous unilateralism over which America has developed its Foreign Policy. The following section will offer a critical analysis of US Foreign Policy under the current administration. Part III tries to offer a balanced account between those who see the *Bush Doctrine* as a necessary instrument to save the West by protecting its values, and those who criticize the arrogance and selfishness with which the Bush Administration has adopted its so called pre-emptive policy. By conducting an effort to understand why is it that the events of September 11 have become such a big deal in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy, part III will also try to offer a general overview on the supposed unilateral effects of 09/11 over this Administration’s foreign affairs.

Finally, part IV will include –as a manner of conclusion– an argument on the need to liberate American Foreign Policy 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 against terrorism” or the implications that a “preemptive war” may have for the preservation of its national security. American primacy implies important responsibilities and the world is still waiting for the greatest power to turn its political rhetoric into a precious reality.

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***Introduction***

With the death of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, many believed in the inauguration of a new era of peace and prosperity. Analysts –liberals in particular– predicted the consolidation of a new international order characterized by the creation of a free market, an absolute triumph of liberal democracy and the confirmation of the United States as the lone great power. A decade later, the only prediction that we can account as an actual fact is the one regarding the United States as the only superpower. Today, the largest economy in the planet not only enjoys of an unprecedented political power, but it has built the greatest military-industrial apparatus that the world has ever known. In terms of its social and cultural values, the so-called “American way of life”, has turned out to be the necessary foundation for the development and consolidation of this society’s greatest achievements: a reliable system of civil liberties, high levels of economic wealth and incredible scientific and technological advances.

If we measure a nation’s power in terms of the standard components that most International Relations scholars recognize as valid, we can easily argue that America is, without a doubt, the only and greatest power in the world. The implications that this fact has had and will continue to have for the United States itself and for the rest of the

international community are enormous. In a recent article wrote for *Foreign Affairs*, Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth mention that, in today's world, US dominance is the status quo. America has already emerged as a hegemonic power and it has no rival or potential rival in the foreseeable future. America is superior in any of the critical dimensions of power, whether militarily, economically, technologically or scientifically (Research and development). Thus, according to Brooks and Wohlforth, the only two issues left for debate are how long American Primacy will last and what will be its implications for American Foreign Policy.<sup>1</sup>

The following essay is not only an attempt to present the central arguments developed within the political debates Brooks and Wohlforth talk about. It is also an effort to provide a "foreign" perspective to the huge economic, political and social implications that the current American policy towards Iraq has and will have for the rest of the world. Far from trying to determine whether US foreign policy should abandon its unilateralism, engage in the democratic development of international organizations, observe international law or pursue more "benign" trade policies, my efforts concentrate on the idea that the United States will benefit the most from a Foreign Policy that recognizes itself as the major architect of world politics. In other words, US Foreign Policy makers should be aware of the great impact that their economic, political or military decisions have, not only for America and its citizens but for all the other nations and, consequently, for the majority of the world's population.

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<sup>1</sup> See Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2002, pages 20-33.

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The first section of my essay 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 of my essay will include a closest view on the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as an instrument to demonstrate not only that American Foreign Policy hasn’t changed that much after 09/11, but also as a tool to account for the dangerous unilateralism over which America has developed its Foreign Policy. The following section will offer a critical analysis of US Foreign Policy under the current administration. Part III tries to offer a balanced account between those who see the *Bush Doctrine* as a necessary instrument to save the West by protecting its values, and those who criticize the arrogance and selfishness with which the Bush

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<sup>2</sup> For an interesting and more detailed insight on this topic see Walter Mead, *The Four School Masters*, Books & Articles on-line, UNAM-FCE

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Finally, part IV will include –as a manner of conclusion– an argument on the need to liberate American Foreign Policy 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 against terrorism” or the implications that a preventive war has for the preservation of its national security. American primacy implies important responsibilities and the world is still waiting for the greatest power to turn its political rhetoric into a precious reality. Five hundred years ago, the half Inca-half Spaniard poet Garcilaso de la Vega wrote “mundo solo hay uno” (“there is just one world”). Impressed by the magnificent glory of the Empire ruled by Charles V, de la Vega warned the emperor about the risks of misusing its enormous power, “whatever decision the Metropoli takes, it will certainly has an impact on every corner of our precious world”.<sup>3</sup>

## 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 power and magnitude of its effects shape the nature of world politics in a serious and profound way. In fact, we can easily argue that American Foreign Policy shapes international relations so deeply, that even US foreign policy-makers very often are not able to understand the magnitude and impact of their decisions around the world. The bottom line is that US foreign policy matters, and it matters a lot. This phenomenon finds an accurate explanation in the Neo-Realist tradition. According to scholars like Kenneth Waltz or John Mearsheimer, in the anarchic conditions of international relations, great powers' specific weight is what matters most.

The end of the Cold War left the United States as the only great superpower. Authors like Samuel Huntington stressed the importance of the US unique role, by analyzing what he decided to call "*US Primacy*". 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 even

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<sup>3</sup> See Edmundo O'Gorman, *La invension de America*, UNAM-FCE, 1989, pp 187.

<sup>4</sup> See Samuel Huntington, "*The Lonely Superpower*", *Foreign Affairs*, March/April, 1999

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. 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”.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in his analysis, Achcar 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”.<sup>6</sup> Too often, Achcar argues, “their [Western] ‘humanism’ is nothing more than a masked expression of their own ethnocentrism”.<sup>7</sup>

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– that “the idea that the United States had a special and unique mission, assigned by a

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<sup>5</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, James Strachey trans. And ed., \*New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1962, p. 13, on Gilbert Achcar, “After September 11: The Clash of Barbarisms”, *Monthly Review*, September 2002, p. 26

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert Archar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26

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."<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 U.S. 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".<sup>10</sup>

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

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 27

<sup>8</sup> Mary A. Heiss, "The Evolution of the Imperial Idea and US National Identity", *Diplomatic History*, Fall 2002, Vol. 26, Num. 4, p. 520

<sup>9</sup> After collecting and comparing several sources, Heiss understands "Imperial" as the policy of a major power that claims some responsibility for the ordering of the world, and "National Identity" as the images that a people in any given time and place forms of its own culture. See Mary A. Heiss, *Op. Cit.*, p. 513

<sup>10</sup> Mary A. Heiss, *Op. Cit.*, p. 540

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" the notion 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 foreign. According to Campbell, what he calls "outside dangers" has 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.<sup>11</sup>

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

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<sup>11</sup> See David Campbell, *Writing Security. United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 289

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”,<sup>12</sup> 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 the arrogance of the US government, especially if we compare such treatment with the one given to the “American Taliban”. 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”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> David Campbell, *Op. Cit.*, p. 69

<sup>13</sup> Alan Gilbert, *“New Institutions for Democracy and Peace”*, Unpublished, p.1

## **Part II. The Immediate Past**

For international economist Charles P. Kindleberger, the aggressive economic depression that took place in 1929 was the consequence, in part, of a dramatic lack of leadership after World War I. According to Kindleberger, of the two great powers that would have been able to assume a leadership role during the twenty year period that took place between the Treaty of Versailles and the invasion of Poland, Great Britain couldn't do it, and the United States didn't want to. Ironically enough, we can argue something very similar regarding the post-Cold War years. Some analysts believe that many of the conflicts that appeared during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century could have been avoided. Instead, these conflicts not only appeared, but unnecessarily continue over months and years only because –once again– America did not want to assume the responsibility of its unique hegemonic position, while the Europeans –once again– were not able to do it.

Whether or not the major conflicts that appeared during the 1990's were the consequence of a lack of leadership, is something that remains highly debatable. In fact, we can easily argue that some of the major human tragedies that took place during the 90's were the product of American leadership. For example, according to United Nations estimates, 90,000 people have died every year for the last ten years from the effects of the embargo against Iraq.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq have cause more deaths, suffering and unnecessary pain, than say, for instance, the deaths cause by weapons of mass destruction. On this regard, John and Karl Mueller concluded that “if

the U.N. estimates of the human damage in Iraq are even roughly correct, it would appear that [U.S.] economic sanctions may well have been a necessary cause of the deaths of more people in Iraq than have been slain by all so-called weapons of mass destruction throughout history”.<sup>15</sup> The previous insight on the economic sanctions against Iraq acquire an even more dramatic, offensive and cynic dimension when we consider the declaration made in 1996 by the then US Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeline Albright: “The death of half a million Iraqi children is ‘worth it’ to Washington, so long as the Iraqi government was being contained”.<sup>16</sup> Madeleine Albright never lost her job for saying this. She continued to travel the world representing the views and aspirations of the US government.<sup>17</sup> More pertinently, the sanctions against Iraq remained even with the outbreak of the second Gulf War last March.

The chilly estimates offered by several United Nations agencies as a result of their analysis on the impact of US economic sanctions over the Iraqi population as well as the perversity of Washington’s *realpolitik*, find their equivalent on the multiple conflicts that erupted around the world immediately after the end of the Cold War. From Central Asia to the African Continent and from the Middle East to Eastern Europe, the 1990’s were characterized by the violence of hundreds of internal and regional conflicts, the majority of which erupted as a consequence of old ethnic, religious or social fractures. The fact that many analysts like to consider the overwhelming passivity with which the United

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<sup>14</sup> See Gilbert Achcar, Op.Cit., p. 23

<sup>15</sup> John Mueller and Karl Mueller, “*Sanctions of Mass Destruction*”, Foreign Affairs, May/June 1999, p. 51

<sup>16</sup> Quoted on Salim Yaqub, “*Imperious Doctrines: U.S.-Arab relations from Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush*”, Diplomatic History, Vol. 26, Num. 4, Fall 2002, p. 590

<sup>17</sup> Arundhati Roy, *The algebra of Infinite Justice*, Viking, Penguin Books, India, 2001, p. 225.

States dealt with some of these tragedies, as one of the reasons for which so many people died and suffered during all those years, is as unfair as it is ephemeral.

Unless we can actually prove that the U.S. Foreign Policy was always and exclusively defined by a clear interest to conduct or support the massacres that took event in places like Rwanda or Sarajevo, it is unfair to blame the United States for every single tragedy that occurred during the 1990's based on the premise of its supposed responsibility as the only superpower. To do so, would be to implicitly negate the historical responsibility of other major actors like, for instance, former colonial powers –or even worse– to implicitly liberate the actual perpetrators of the massacres from any kind of direct responsibility. In other words, and paraphrasing the European diplomat, Giandomenico Picco, we can argue that U.S. foreign policy does not always kill, rape, remove “unfriendly” governments or destroy democracies. Sometimes “the real culprits are other nations or individuals alone. They just happened to used history, ethnicity or religion to hide their own responsibility”.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the central argument of this modest attempt to criticize U.S. foreign policy during the last decade of last Century, emphatically tries to avoid the popular discourse that conveniently finds U.S. foreign policy as equally responsible for everything that happened during the 90's. As I mentioned before, U.S. foreign policy should be accountable for many atrocities that occurred during the last decade, but certainly not for all of them. Some U.S. corporations and members of the ruling elite, perhaps, may have a

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<sup>18</sup> Giandomenico Picco, “*Leaders without enemies*”, The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, Vol 26:1, Winter/Spring 2002, p.5

lot of responsibility in say, for example, the illegal trade of conventional weapons, but that does not mean that U.S. foreign policy –as a whole– is responsible for the deaths caused by such weapons.

The fact, for example, that many of the conflicts in Africa were contained, overseen or masqueraded by the Soviet-American antagonism during the Cold War years, only to be ignored by the centers of power during the so-called decade of globalization and transnational communications<sup>19</sup>, does not necessarily mean that the U.S. was directly or indirectly responsible for those tragedies. In other words, the issue should not be whether U.S. leadership –or the lack of it– actually complicated or in fact helped to solve some of the conflicts that appeared during the post-cold war years. Instead, at least for our purpose, the question should be why is it that –despite its unprecedented power– the United States played such an inconsistent role in world politics? During the last decade, US foreign policy remained constantly shaped, or at least continuously pulled, by the contradictory but paradoxically interrelated forces of isolationism and unilateralism.

One plausible explanation might be found on the extraordinary and unpredictable circumstances with which the Cold War ended. For many U.S. analysts and policy makers, the end of the Soviet Union meant as well the death of the Polar Star. Without the presence of a well identified enemy, US Foreign Policy makers and international relations analysts behaved during the post-cold war years as if they were playing a

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<sup>19</sup> Perhaps we can argue that some of the inattention derived from a lack of concern about foreign lives; this lack of concern is characteristic of every human being, but it is remarkably accentuated among the members of the Western culture. On this issue see Gilbert Achcar, *Op.Cit.*, p. 24

pervert round of “the blind hen”.<sup>20</sup> The problem with the unfortunate lack of direction and understanding generated by the collapse of the Soviet Union was the eventual proliferation of empirical predictions that played the role of scientific truths. Although directly affected by such phenomena, IR theory was finally able to locate every serious effort to understand the post-cold war era, between the pessimistic views of so-called offensive realists and the optimistic views of prominent neo-liberals. In fact, the debate between those who praise globalization, and those who criticize its effects can be located between these two extremes. The debate on the benefits or problems of globalization, which formally took shape during the early 1980’s, received a significant impulse to the point that it became one of the most fruitful and interesting debates in IR during the years that followed the end of the bipolar balance.

Regarding U.S. foreign policy, some analysts argue that the lack of a well identified enemy did constitute the main reason for which the United States played such an inconsistent role in world politics. In contrast, some other analysts like to believe that the inconsistency and ambiguity of U.S. foreign policy during the 1990’s was due to a combination of different factors. From the lack of a well identified enemy, to the demanding and absorbing forces of globalization, and from the emergence of new nuclear powers, to the attractive rhetoric offered by the proliferation of democracy and free trade around the world, U.S. policy makers were trapped, as always, in the old discourses of the traditional foreign policy schools. Interesting enough, the only point over which every analyst seemed to agree, was the almost indisputable fact that ever since the balance of

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<sup>20</sup> The “Blind Hen” is a popular game among Latin American children, in which one of the participants is put in the middle of a circle and with his/her eyes covered, tries to identify those who bother him/her.

power changed from a bipolar system to a uni-polar one, American foreign policy has been operating over the realm of choice and not of necessity. The exceptional power of the United States provided the necessary tools with which US foreign policy was able to enforce its will, manipulate international organizations, co-opt its adversaries and ignore international agreements. Besides, American hegemony provides the possibility of protecting and promoting U.S. national interest, from an arrogant –almost cynic– unilateral approach. The result was the propagation, among scholars, government officials and ordinary people around the world, of the idea that “contemporary International Relations were about the U.S. and the rest”.<sup>21</sup>

For example, according to analyst Soledad Loaeza, during the 1990’s the US government “significantly reduced its budget for the creation or maintenance of development agencies and drastically cut off public financial aid to international non-governmental organizations, especially those working in the areas of public or environmental health”. On behalf of the U.S. national interest and despite its rhetoric in favor of liberal values around the world, Loaeza argues that “the Clinton Administration closed social and cultural representations before several national governments, and reduced international organizations to the role of powerless puppets, by simply ignoring, violating or abandoning important international agreements”.<sup>22</sup>

In regard to U.S. economic and financial power, American hegemony was consolidated, fundamentally, through the eventual control that the United States government acquired

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<sup>21</sup> Juan Ma. Alponete, “*El poder tiene nombre*”, *Semanario de El Colegio de Mexico*, Num. 27, Vol 6, p. 18

<sup>22</sup> Soledad Loaeza, “*El 11 de Septiembre*”, Editorial, *Diario El Pais*, Diciembre 27, 2001.

over the international institutions created right after World War II. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank were conceived in Bretton Woods as multilateral organizations for financial cooperation and economic development. Yet, these institutions have become nothing else but loyal US servants, very often protecting and enforcing the interests of Washington. In *Globalization and its Discontents*<sup>\*</sup>, Joseph Stiglitz offers a critique of globalization and of the role played by multilateral institutions and their principal shareholders in pressing developing countries to liberalize their economies. Following Susan Strange's view on International Organizations "as instruments for the pursuit of the national interest of the strongest by other means"<sup>23</sup>, Joseph Stiglitz argues that the simple-minded economic doctrines enforced by the World Bank and the IMF, inadequately tailored to the realities of developing countries, causing, in fact, more harm than good. "Too often", Stiglitz continues, "the economic openness and liberalization promoted by the centers of economic power through the manipulation and control of international institutions, has resulted in a complete devastation for millions of people around the world".<sup>24</sup>

The economic sanctions imposed on Iraq represent a clear example of the lack of morality and arrogant stupidity that characterized Western countries. Yet, the financial devastation and social disruption originated in developing countries after the implementation of neo-liberal doctrines designed by the IMF, represent the ambition and selfishness of an international economic policy that clearly serves, from Washington, the

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\* Not to confuse with Sakia Sassen's book of the same title.

<sup>23</sup> See Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State*, C.S.I.R., Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 169

<sup>24</sup> Barry Eichengreen, "The Globalization Wars", an article on Joseph Stiglitz's *Globalization and its Discontents*, Foreign Affairs, July/Aug 2002, pages 157-164

economic interests of the owners of capital. By taking advantage of their privileged position and convenient access to unique technologies, US financial companies and great private investors have become another source of power to which US Foreign Policy must serve.

During the 1990's and while the United States were enjoying an unprecedented economic growth, other medium and small economic powers experience financial devastation and dramatic social convulsions. From Mexico to Indonesia and from Russia to Brazil the real micro-economic effects of the neo-liberal macroeconomic reforms promoted by the IMF were violently felt by millions of people. Interesting enough, those economic crises were not only the effects of corruption or incompetence within the ruling elites of the suffering countries. Instead, they were also the product of pervert and insensitive policies orchestrated by financial institutions like the IMF on behalf of the political and economic interests of institutional shareholders dominated by American corporations or governmental shareholders headed by the US government.

As Gramsci would argue, these financial institutions were clearly established, and certainly have been maintained, as a means to satisfy the political and economic interests of certain elites within a particular hegemonic order. In other words, ever since the end of the Second World War, financial institutions like the IMF or the World Bank have been nothing else but an instrument through which the United States and other economic powers have imposed their political and economic conditions over less powerful financial partners. Ironically, it was precisely during the decade of globalization that these

financial institutions became a puppet for the exclusive use of the United States. “In social science parlance, the United States acted as foremost producer of global public goods. Just to note the acronyms that stand for those goods –UN, IMF, GATT, OECD, NATO, WTO, etc.– is to recognize that all were ‘made in the U.S.A.’. These institutions upheld international security and free trade and this cemented America’s preponderance by giving other key players potent reasons for choosing cooperation over ganging up”.<sup>25</sup>

Take for instance the cases of Mexico and Russia. The United States’ reaction to each one of those financial crises was clearly influenced by its geopolitical and economic interests. However, to the eyes of the international community –including of course some US allies– the fact that the US reacted with the exclusive idea of protecting its national interest, was not as grave as the fact that the IMF was used as an instrument for the consolidation of those interests. By taking advantage of its unique economic and political power, the Clinton Administration practically used the IMF as its private bank, authorizing loans that helped “to rescue” the Mexican and Russian economies on behalf of the particular interests of US private investors.

The unilateral and selfish nature of U.S. foreign policy during the 1990’s is evident. Even when the United States worked “in cooperation” with the international community, unilateral signs allowed by the exceptionality of U.S. power were constantly sent. Take for example the so-called peace-keeping operations that took place under the Clinton Administration. Even when some of these operations were orchestrated over the “consensus” of the international community (mainly, the North Atlantic Alliance), the

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<sup>25</sup> Josef Joffe, “*Of hubs, spokes and public goods*”, The National Interest, Number 69, Fall 2002, p. 19

United States usually maintained an absolute autonomy on its decision making process and constantly rejected even the possibility of subjecting itself to the specifications and resolutions of the United Nations or any other international or regional organization for this matter.<sup>26</sup> Another clear dimension of American unilateralism was the long list of nations that were subjected by Washington to political or economic sanctions, affecting – by the way– a good portion of the world’s population: China, North Korea, Cuba, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Pakistan, just to mention some.

In December of 1998, former Secretary of State Madeline Albright published an article in Foreign Affairs in which she specified that the main objective of American Foreign Policy was –paraphrasing– to ensure the security, prosperity and well being of all Americans.<sup>27</sup> Right after September 11, however, it was obvious that the resources employed to reach those objectives were not enough. Ironically, the immediate analysis of the attacks –especially in Europe, far East Asia and the so called Third world– chronically revealed the inefficiency of US unilateralism and emphatically criticized the arrogance with which the only superpower have dealt with some key international issues since the final years of last century. As Arundhati Roy majestically suggests in her *“Algebra of Infinite Justice”*:

Terrorism as a phenomenon may never go away. But if it is to be contained, the first step is for America to at least acknowledge that it shares the planet with other nations, with other human beings, who, even

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<sup>26</sup> A good example that supports this argument is the so-called Rumsfeld Doctrine. This doctrine proclaims that “the mission determines the coalition, and not the other way round”, and its first victim was NATO. Indeed, NATO as we have known it, is dead. The anti-Soviet alliance has been replaced by NATO II, best defined as a collection of states, now including Russia, from which the United States draws coalition partners *ad hoc*. For more on this issue, see Josef Joffe, *Op.Cit.*, pages 17-18

<sup>27</sup> Madeleine K. Albright, *“The testing of American Foreign Policy”*, Foreign Affairs, Nov/Dec 1998, p.

if they are not on TV, have loves and griefs and stories and songs and sorrows and, for heaven's sake, rights. Instead, when Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defense Secretary was asked what he would call a victory in America's new war, he said that if he could convince the world that Americans must be allowed to continue with their way of life, he would consider it a victory.<sup>28</sup>

Protectionism, unilateralism, self interest, all have been proved inefficient and even dangerous not only for America, but for the rest of the world. The tragedy of September 11 did in fact offer the possibility to rectify the way, but as Alan Gilbert notices, the Bush administration has already squandered opportunities to pursue a peaceful, more benign world.<sup>29</sup> The world is once again pending from a very thin wire.

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<sup>28</sup> Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Special Defense Briefing, "Developments Concerning Attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center Last Week", Federal News Service, 20 September 2001, in Arundhati Roy, *Op. Cit.*, p. 233

<sup>29</sup> Alan Gilbert, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1

### Part III. The Administration of George W. Bush

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”.<sup>30</sup>

In a documentary called “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 new grand strategy, formally articulated in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America<sup>31</sup>. Released September 17, 2002, twenty months after President Bush took office, the 33-page “National Security Strategy” (NSS) offers the administration’s first comprehensive rationale for a new, aggressive

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<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*, 2002, in <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/iraq>

<sup>31</sup> Frontline, “The War Behind Closed Doors”, Introduction, PBS, March 2003. In <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/iraq>

approach to national security. The new strategy calls for *pre-emptive* action against hostile states and terror groups, and it states that the U.S. “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”.<sup>32</sup>

But 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.<sup>33</sup> 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. Eighteen months after the attacks, however, the unilateral decision of attacking Iraq revealed not only America’s strong links with its immediate past, but the arrogance and selfishness of its new grand strategy.

Ironically and perhaps because of the “frankness” of some members of President Bush’s cabinet, this administration’s foreign policy has been 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, has been

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<sup>32</sup> Frontline, “Op.Cit.”, Chapter I. *Assesing the Bush Doctrine*, PBS, March 2003. In <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows>

determined to set a course that will remake America's role in the world.<sup>34</sup> On this regard, the comments expressed by National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, in an article written for *Foreign Affairs* offer a shocking example of this administration's political intentions. In her article, Rice appears as a fearless defender of U.S. unilateralism. A unilateralism that she justifies over the tacit assumption that American values could be treated, in fact, as universal values. Her position is 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'".<sup>35</sup> 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 U.S. foreign policy, but only secondary effects, only appearing after the consolidation, preservation and promotion of the National Interest.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Frontline, *Op Cit.*, Introduction, PBS, March 2003. in <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows>

<sup>34</sup> Frontline, *Op Cit.*, Introduction, PBS, March 2003. in <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows>

<sup>35</sup> Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the national interest", *Foreign Affairs*, Jan/Feb 2000

<sup>36</sup> See Condoleezza Rice, *Op. Cit.*, *Foreign Affairs*, Jan/Feb 2000

Of course, the personal beliefs of some members of the Bush Administration –among them Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and perhaps most importantly, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz<sup>37</sup>– are not the only reason that can explain the persistence of unilateralism in U.S. foreign policy, as well as the persistence of numerous obstacles to overcome it. From the isolationist –“couldn’t care less”– tradition of American public opinion, to the never well-controlled forces of globalization, or the military conservatism of some U.S. officials, United States foreign policy has been continuously manipulated by unilateral premises under the shadows of multilateral ones.

Thus, we can argue, for example, that America’s public opinion was an essential element of the unilateral belligerent reactions assumed by the U.S. government right after the attacks of 09/11. Therefore, if we want to understand why is it that President Bush talked about “infinite justice”, we should take in consideration the expectations of a people 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”.

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<sup>37</sup> Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz has been at the center of Pentagon Strategic Planning in both Bush administrations. A hawk on the use of U.S. military power, Wolfowitz took the lead in drafting the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance on America’s military posture toward the world. The draft said that containment was an old idea, a relic of the Cold War. It advocated that America should maintain military strength beyond challenge and use it to preempt provocations from rogue states with weapons of mass destruction. And it stated that, if necessary, the U.S. should be prepared to act alone. Leaked to the press, Wolfowitz’s draft was rewritten and softened by then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney. Ten years later, many analysts see a strong resemblance between President Bush’s 2002 National Security Strategy and Wolfowitz’s 1992 draft. In *Frontline*, Op Cit., Chapter 3. *1992: First Draft of a Grand Strategy*, PBS, March 2003. in <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows>

But as Arundhati Roy points out, the question is... Infinite Justice for whom? Is this America's War against Terror in America or against Terror in general? It must be hard for ordinary Americans so recently bereaved, to look up at the world with their eyes full of tears and encounter what might appear to them to be indifference. But it isn't indifference, Roy argues, it is just augury. An absence of surprise. The tired wisdom of knowing that what goes around, eventually comes around.<sup>38</sup>

The issue of globalization, comparatively, deserves separate attention. The debate about globalization and its effects starts with the definition of the term.<sup>39</sup> 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,<sup>40</sup> and "unilateralism", understood as the extension of U.S. national interests and particular values to the rest of the world.<sup>41</sup> To identify the notion of globalization with U.S. 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 U.S. 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

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<sup>38</sup> Arundhati Roy, Op. Cit, p. 222

<sup>39</sup> In my opinion, one of the most helpful definitions of globalization is offered by Martin Shaw. By distinguishing international from global relations, Shaw argues that the process of globalization involves the unification of the social world and the relativization of differences within it. See Martin Shaw, *Theory of the Global State*, C.S.I.R., Cambridge University Press, p. 18

<sup>40</sup> See Ralf Dahrendorf, "Can democracy survive globalization?", *The National Interest*, Num. 65, Fall 2001

<sup>41</sup> James Kurth, "The next NATO. Building an American Commonwealth of Nations", *The National Interest*, Num. 65, Fall 2001

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 U.S. 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 U.S. interventions (including the last U.S. intervention in Iraq) and the decision of the last two administrations to station U.S. 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 U.S. intervention in Somalia in 1993, a new Presidential Decision Directive (PDD 25) was promulgated in Washington regarding the participation of U.S. 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.<sup>42</sup> 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”; weak coalitions similar to the one over which the international campaign against terrorism has been launched.

In consequence, just as it happened during the conflict in the Balkans, today Washington promotes the idea of an international peace-keeping coalition, but does not share the idea of subjecting its soldiers to the command of a foreign General, especially when it comes to what Washington considers “key military campaigns”. The evidence indicates that U.S. foreign policy has operated, lately, over the basis of selfishness and unilateral interests. No one good realist, in fact, would be surprised with the formulation of a foreign policy which main objective is to serve a national interest traditionally defined in terms of power. For many analysts and U.S. 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”.<sup>43</sup> Yet, far from bolstering the mechanisms of an international community that the United States helped create, the Bush Administration have shown signs of a dangerous unilateralism, not to mention the gleams of moral superiority that can actually be found in Bush’s

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<sup>42</sup> Brian Urquhart, “*Mission Impossible*”, The New York Review of Books, November 18, 1999

<sup>43</sup> James Chace, “*Avoiding Empire*”, The National Interest, Number 69, Fall 2002, p. 21

Doctrine and the absolute indifference with which this administration has dealt with recent U.N. Security Council resolutions.

The war against terrorism has helped to reaffirm U.S. 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”.<sup>44</sup> The dangers of such unilateral measures are evident. America could eventually find itself trapped in the agony of an endless war that will 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 implemented by the Bush administration against Iraq– may turned out to be the source of deepest international conflicts, not to mention the enormous challenged posted by the imminent need of reconstructing both, Iraq and Afghanistan.

The so-called *Bush Doctrine* offers in fact a very good example of all that is wrong today with U.S. foreign policy. As noticed by Walter LaFeber, “on the night of the tragedies, President George W. Bush declared on national television that ‘We [Americans] will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed the acts and those who harbor them.’” At that moment, La Feber argues, “the new doctrine sounded more benign than it did six months later, when the president officially extended his doctrine to Iraq, Iran and

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 21

North Korea”<sup>45</sup>, the so-called “*axis of evil*”. Eighteen months later, some argue that there is more confusion than clarity about the direction and motives of U.S. foreign policy, while others, like John Ikenberry, suggest that the Bush Administration is actually providing American foreign policy of a clear purpose and direction. “For the first time since the end of the cold war”, Ikenberry argues, “a new *grand strategy* is taking shape in Washington. It is advanced most directly as a response to terrorism, but it also constitutes a broader view about how the United States should wield power and organize world order. According to this new paradigm, America is to be less bound to its partners and to global rules and institutions while it steps forward to play a more unilateral and anticipatory role in attacking terrorist threats and confronting rogue states seeking weapons of mass destruction”. To put it short, “the United States will use its unrivaled military power to manage the global order”.<sup>46</sup>

The consolidation of a new *grand strategy* along with significant transformations in the U.S. foreign relations with key international actors like Russia or China, were in part the “result of the September 11 attacks and the *Bush Doctrine* formulated in response to the terrorism”.<sup>47</sup> However, nothing has raised more concerns and speculative debates among U.S. allies and other members of the international community, than the war against Iraq and the problems of national reconstruction in Afghanistan and other ‘*failed states*’<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Walter LaFeber, “*The Bush Doctrine*”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 26, Num. 4, Fall 2002, p. 543

<sup>46</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “*America’s Imperial Ambition*”, *Foreign Affairs*, Sep/Oct 2002, p. 49

<sup>47</sup> Walter LaFeber, “*The Bush Doctrine*”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 26, Num. 4, Fall 2002, p. 548

<sup>48</sup> Today, only a handful of the world’s nation-states can be categorized as failed or collapsed. Several more, however, are serious candidates. For more on this issue see: Robert I. Rotberg, “The Nature of Nation-State failure”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2002, pp. 85-96

Throughout its history, “the United States has prided itself on not initiating war, or at least on finding a pretext in enemy action for doing so. Not since some Americans advocated *preemptive* or *preventive* war against the USSR or China was so much talk heard of starting a war –only this time, loudly endorsed by the president”.<sup>49</sup> In general terms, the war against Iraq as an extension of the war on terrorism, has raised significant opposition around the world. With the exception of Great Britain and, perhaps Israel, no other country supported so openly the American invasion of Iraq. In the United States and even within the U.S. government, opinions are divided between those who unconditionally support the use of force as a *preventive* measure for future terrorist attacks, and those who are skeptical about the real purpose of a war against Iraq –after all, nothing seemed likelier to trigger Hussein’s efforts to attack U.S. targets, than an American “*preventive*” attack.<sup>50</sup>

In an effort to find a conciliatory balance between these antagonistic views, Kenneth Pollack reached the conclusion, before the War, that the U.S. had no option but to invade Iraq and eliminate the current regime. Pollack argued that “[H]awks were wrong to think the problem is desperately urgent or connected to terrorism, but right to see the prospect of a nuclear-armed Saddam Hussein as so worrisome that it requires drastic action. Doves were right about Iraq’s not being a good candidate for an Afghan-style war, but wrong to

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Sherry, Op.Cit., p. 643

<sup>50</sup> Unlike the doctrine of massive retaliation, the doctrine of *preventive attack* has an interesting historical antecedent. In November of 1914, US president Woodrow Wilson launched a preventive attack against the Mexican military dictatorship of Victoriano Huerta. Wilson’s intention was to remove Huerta from power, call for democratic elections, stop the fighting and prevent the possibility of a European intervention in the Mexican conflict that might have put at risk US hegemony in the region. For more on this issue see: Lorenzo Meyer, “*Cuando Mexico fue Irak y Huerta Hussein*”, Diario El Universal, Editorial, 06/20/02.

think that inspections and deterrence alone can contain Saddam”.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, Joseph Nye suggested in an article published before the invasion, that the debate on a possible war against Iraq –especially now that the U.S. Congress has authorized the use of force– should not be seen as one between ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’, but as one between ‘hawks’ and ‘owls’. The ‘owls’, Nye argued, would employ military force only to back-up those UN Security Council resolutions that might be violated by the Iraqi president, but they certainly will take the time to conform a vast multilateral coalition.<sup>52</sup> The problem, paraphrasing Nye, was to contain hawks’ impulses. For them, the idea of allowing other nations to impact U.S. strategic decisions –regardless of the magnitude of such impact– is unconceivable. 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” not only seem to be ignoring all those claims and voices, but they seem to be forgetting one little detail: After Saddam, what?

This takes us to the other great concern that has appeared in the international arena after 09/11. One of the reasons for which most people were opposing an American intervention in Iraq, is precisely their enormous preoccupation with what exactly will come next. The international community was questioning the possibility of a war against Iraq not only in terms of its legitimacy, but in terms of the humanitarian impact that the war would have over the Iraqi population and the dangerous instability that the war would trigger in the region. However, one of the main concerns of the world community still has to do with the nature of the regime that will substitute Hussein’s dictatorship.

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<sup>51</sup> See Kenneth M. Pollack, “Next Stop Baghdad?”, summary of the article, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2002, p. I

Taking for granted a U.S. victory in a *preventive* war against Iraq, members of the international community have expressed similar concerns for the future of the Arab country, than the concerns they expressed for the future of Afghanistan more than a year ago.

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 an intense debate between ample sectors of American scholars and policy makers. The debate in part 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 U.S. 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, American foreign policy equals the promotion of Western social policies and values. On the right, Kissinger continues, there are some Americans who believe –sometimes based on a frivolous interpretation of history– that the solution to the world’s ills is American hegemony.<sup>53</sup>

Pulling from the left, “many analysts and politicians have claimed that the September 11 terrorist attacks provide concrete evidence that the United States should incorporate ‘*nation building*’ into its national security strategy as a tool for preventing the formation

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<sup>52</sup> Joseph Nye, “*To attack or not to attack?*”, Editorial, Financial Times On-line, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

<sup>53</sup> See Henry Kissinger, *Does America needs a Foreign Policy?*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2001

or continued existence of states where international terrorists can organize and operate”.<sup>54</sup> 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 [Americans] adversaries’ regimes, is less an idealistic option than a strategic imperative”.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast, pulling from the right, hardcore realists like John Mearsheimer or Robert Jervis, 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”.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> 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

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<sup>54</sup> Gary T. Dempsey, “Nation building’s newest disguise”, *Orbis, A Journal of World Affairs*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Vol. 46, Num. 3, Summer 2002, p. 415. For Dempsey, *nation building* can take many shapes, from full-scale occupation or establishing a UN protectorate to seizing command of a capital and installing a sympathetic government or manipulating local politics by using diplomatic pressure and financial aid.

<sup>55</sup> Gary Schmitt, “A case of continuity”, *The National Interest*, Num. 69, Fall 2002, p. 12

<sup>56</sup> Gary T. Dempsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 417

<sup>57</sup> Robert Jervis, “*After 09/11: What has changed and what has not?*”, Pagina Web del Centro de Estudios Internacionales de El Colegio de Mexico, ColMex on-line, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2002.

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”.<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup>

The problem with these realist approaches –whose basic premise is to ensure national security through the maximization of power– and the war on terrorism, 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”.<sup>60</sup> The final purpose of a *pre-emptive 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”, seems to be forcing US Foreign Policy to move farther and farther from a healthy balance. Rather

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<sup>58</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W.W. Norton, 20001, pp.15-16. Quoted in Gary T. Dempsey, *Op.Cit.*, p. 433

<sup>59</sup> Gary T. Dempsey, *Op. Cit.*, p. 434

than contributing to the consolidation of a moderate synthesis, the concepts emerging from the Bush administration's "war on terrorism" form a neo-imperial vision in which the United States arrogates to itself the global role of setting standards, determining threats, and using force. These 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 administration's approach is fraught with peril and likely to fail. If history is any guide, it will trigger resistance that will leave America in a more hostile and divided world".<sup>61</sup>

Months before the war started, the winds of prudence and moderation appeared to be touching the temple of American Military Commander in Chief. On October 22, 2002, President Bush suggested that "if Saddam Hussein complied with every U.N. Security Council resolution, it would signal the regime has changed".<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, America's decision to attack Iraq despite the Security Council demands, as well as the multiple effects of the international crisis that erupted on September 11, 2001 reminded us not to run into conclusions so eagerly. As noticed by Walter LaFeber, "Washington's foreign policy could be mercurial, unpredictable, and –in its ignorance and inattention– devastating. The only constant [has been] the importance of domestic interests and security, an importance that greatly intensified after September 11".<sup>63</sup> Thus, as long as Washington continues to show its inability, if not its indifference, to everything that links

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<sup>60</sup> Seyom Brown, "World Interests and the Changing Dimension of Security", in Michael Klare and Danier Thomas (eds.), *World Security*, 1994, p. 10

<sup>61</sup> See G. John Ikenberry, "*America's Imperial Ambition*", summary of the article, *Foreign Affairs*, Sep/Oct 2002, p. II

<sup>62</sup> See: *New York Times* on-line, Oct/22/02. In the same context, President Bush mentioned that "[he] saw a significant difference between North Korea's development of Nuclear Weapons and Iraq pursuit of them". To know more about American preventive policy in the case of North Korea, see: Victor D. Cha, "*Hawk engagement and preventive defense on the Korean Peninsula*", *International Security*, Vol. 27, Issue 1, Summer 2002, pp. 40-78

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.

The United States of America needs the world as much as the world needs the United States. If U.S. policy makers, blinded by the exceptionality of American power, continue to ignore the interdependent nature of international relations, they will never be able to realize the enormous importance of enforcing international law and engaging in multilateral agreements. “In focusing on the destruction of ‘rogue states’ the Bush Administration may have settled for something within its military capacity, but in dealing with the consequences of that destruction it will need all the help it can get”.<sup>64</sup> An authentic international community can only be founded over the basis of that which Condoleezza Rice considers secondary: the conciliatory power of international organizations –including the United Nations– and the regulatory power of international law –starting by observing the resolutions and mandates adopted by the Security Council. 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”.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Walter LaFeber, *Op.Cit.*, p. 543

<sup>64</sup> Michael Howard, “*What friends are fore*”, *The National Interest*, Num. 69, Fall 2002, p. 9

<sup>65</sup> Michael Sherry, “*Humility for Globalcop?*”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 26, Num. 4, Fall 2002, p. 637

## Part IV. Conclusion

How will America use her power? Before 09/11, during the first seven months of his administration, President Bush accumulated affront after affront, offense after offense, mistake after mistake. Bush offended the international community by rejecting the Treaty of Kyoto against gas emissions, without offering any other alternative. He affronted his own people by opening entire regions of natural reserves to a senseless exploitation. He offended one more time the international community by rejecting the premises of the International Justice Tribunal of Rome and its efforts to legally process war criminals. And finally, he persisted in the mistake of trying to build an anti-missile defense system<sup>66</sup>.

This list of errors and affronts –in no way exclusive or exhaustive– shows the long way the Bush Administration will need to go if they want to eliminate terrorism and ensure a new era of peace and prosperity.<sup>67</sup> The question, then, might not be ‘how will America use her power?’ but ‘how will the President use his power?’ As noticed by Robert Tucker, the answer to this question “has not been reassuring to advocates of multilateralism... The new ‘strike first’ military policy is simply the most revealing

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<sup>66</sup> For a general overview of the Bush Administration Defense Policy, including considerations after September 11, see: Donald H. Rumsfeld, “*Transforming the military*”, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2002, pp. 20-32

<sup>67</sup> One huge error, many critics argue, is the enormous showdown the Bush Administration has put with Iraq and Hussein’s regime. In their opinion, the Bush administration should focus instead on achieving a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, critics fail to understand not only that Palestine is marginal to the symbolism of Arab politics. If a road to a calmer situation in Palestine does in fact exist, it runs through Baghdad. See: Michael Scott Doran, “*Palestine, Iraq and American Strategy*”, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2003, Abstract of the Article, p. 1

expression to date of the administration's determination to follow its own path regardless of the views of long-standing allies".<sup>68</sup>

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 argue 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".<sup>69</sup> Thus, American advocates of multilateralism agree to indicate that a multilateral U.S. foreign policy would be –in fact– in the best interest of the United States. Realists or not, 'hawks' or 'doves', advocates of unilateralism or multilateral fanatics, most American scholars build their arguments over the same exact premise: The United States comes first.

Regardless of the label with which American IR scholars present their theories, the fact that they use the same premise when it comes to the analysis of US foreign policy, opens an endless possibility for political rhetoric. Let consider for example the suggestions that some American scholars have given in relation to what they think the nature of US foreign policy in the immediate future should be. Analysts 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

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<sup>68</sup> Robert W. Tucker, "The end of a contradiction?", *The National Interest*, Num. 69, Fall 2002, p.7

<sup>69</sup> Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p.

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.<sup>70</sup> In relation with his last suggestion, Mearsheimer's proposed policies include the massive withdraw of U.S. troops from Saudi Arabia, the end of the economic sanctions against 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 U.S. 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 effects of this rhetorical condition of American foreign policy can also be found in the diplomacy practiced by different US Administrations. Take for instance the diplomatic efforts of President Bush before the outbreak of the War with Iraq. The multiple complications offered by a then-possible war against Iraq forced the Bush Administration to invest time an effort to persuade the international community of the enormous threat represented by the Iraqi regime. Efforts to reach a consensus in the United Nations Security Council gave the impression that the Bush administration was trying to abandon American unilateralism. However, once we start considering the enormous risks and difficulties posted by a military campaign against Iraq, as well as the potential economic benefits that the end of Hussein's regime might bring to American Oil Companies, the hazards and inconveniences of the diplomatic negotiations acquire a different dimension, not to mention the hazards and inconveniences of ended being a pre-

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<sup>70</sup> John Mearsheimer, "Hearts and Minds", The National Interest,

emptive strike.<sup>71</sup> Besides, the fact that the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, conducted very important diplomatic campaigns on behalf of US interests says more about the complications, credibility and nature of the American campaign, than the strategic need of Great Britain to “bandwagon” with the United States.<sup>72</sup>

In sum, 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”.<sup>73</sup> 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 is in no way different from the unilateralism showed by previous administrations, with the exception of the current international circumstances in which it has to operate. This, however, does not mean that the selfish unilateral measures of U.S. foreign policy constitute the best option to deal with the exceptional circumstances of current international relations.

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<sup>71</sup> For an interesting overview on the economic and geopolitical relevance of controlling Iraq and its oil, see Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La cuestion iraquí. una radiografía minuciosa del Irak moderno*, CNRS, France, 2002

<sup>72</sup> From his key role as a mediator with the governments of China, India or Pakistan right at the beginning of the conflict in Afghanistan, to his later efforts to convince Moscow and Paris governments on the necessity of authorizing the use of force against Iraq, Blair’s diplomatic campaigns can only be compared to those launched by US Secretary of State Collin Powell and have been interpreted by many as a measure to compensate for the evident limitations of the Department of State. Yet, the fact that a British Prime Minister has been defending, so bravely, the principles and premises of a Foreign Policy that is not British can be superficially explained by the neo-realist notion of international “bandwagon”, or better, by psychological approaches like the one develop by Gilbert Achcar. For Achcar, the notion of what he calls “narcissistic compassion” offers a distinct and very interesting insight. For more on this issue, see Gilbert Achcar, *Op.Cit.*, pages 17-29

<sup>73</sup> Robert W. Tucker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7

While sustaining the idea that “American response to 09/11 has not deflected U.S. foreign policy from its historic purpose, but only more precisely defined and re-energized it”,<sup>74</sup> 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 when it tries. It is rather American ‘exceptionalism’ that is normal, and the *Bush Doctrine* is the most recent manifestation of it.”<sup>75</sup> 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”.<sup>76</sup>

As long as the Bush Administration continues to ignoring the importance of finding a “fair equilibrium” between U.S. 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”<sup>77</sup>. But if contemporary international relations is all about terrorism and “evil” regimes with access to non-conventional weapons, who in

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<sup>74</sup> Gary Schmitt, Op.Cit., p. 13

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Pierre Hassner, Op.Cit., p. 33

America is saying something about America's role in the international black markets of drugs and weapons? Who in America is truly concerned with what is happening in Colombia? Who in America will raise the voice for the children in Iraq? Who will stop those who sell weapons in Africa? Who will stop the massacres in Chechnya? Who?

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, planet pollution, international migration, human rights, social development, free and fair trade, etc., 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 U.S. foreign policy –or any other foreign policy for this matter– shall at least try to find a fair balance among these distinct, but not necessarily antagonistic forces.

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<sup>77</sup> Pierre Hassner, "*Definitions, Doctrines and Divergences*", *The National Interest*, Number 69, Fall 2002, p. 30

### *A final thought*

The economic, military and political power of the United States is exceptional. Today, we live in a unipolar world dominated by a country that has achieved the greatest economic, scientific and technological progress ever seen by human history. The wonders and greatness of this country are admirable, its freedoms –for many– desirable. It will be fair to say that the nation conceived by its founding fathers as the anchor for the creation of a new world, based on the enlightenment ideals of freedom, democracy and equality, has realized a plausible effort towards the consolidation of those ideals. In regard to civil or human rights, for example, this country has gone a long way, and with it, a good portion of the world.

The United States have what the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas referred to as “constitutional patriotism”. Namely, a unifier and devote respect for the only thing that America has in common: her political constitution. Precisely, this constitution carries the enlightenment ideals that have allowed this nation to guarantee for its citizens plenty of civil liberties, sadly unconceivable for the citizens of other nations. But among the greatest benefits obtained through the constant struggle for democracy, freedom and equality, one benefit distinguishes itself for being the most valuable: the right to political criticism. Good or bad, repressed or free, co-opted or not, political self- critique is, by far, the greatest characteristic of this incipient American democracy and the only possibility for its improvement.

The terrorist attacks of September 11 have opened a new chapter on the long American tradition of self-critique, while drastically revealing its contemporary nature: today, a critique of American politics cannot be detached from international politics. Thus, as Alan Gilbert argues in his approach to democratic internationalism,<sup>78</sup> a responsible study of American Foreign Policy should not only reject the idea that “the national interest is largely independent of domestic politics”<sup>79</sup> but it should recognize, as noticed by many, that despite American supremacy, the United States cannot go alone.

Self-criticism is essential for, but not a synonym of political improvement. Paraphrasing Jens Bartelson, sometimes the problem resides, precisely, in the critique. Only a criticism capable to detach itself from the discourses of power can be able to develop the basis for an authentic political freedom over which democracy and equality could be seriously pursued. Thus, aware of the potential to develop this kind of criticism in the academic world, Marcuse suggested that it is the responsibility of scholars –of those he called, intelligentsia– to abandon their classrooms and, “by virtue of their privileged position”, to liberate themselves and the rest from “the ideological and material veil of mass communication and indoctrination”.<sup>80</sup> After all, a constructive criticism is less dangerous than a vicious narcissistic praise. Not too long ago, Susan Sontag, one of the most

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<sup>78</sup> To know more about the premises of democratic internationalism, see: Alan Gilbert, *Must Global Politics Constrain Democracy?*, Princeton University Press, Princeton N.J., 1999

<sup>79</sup> Alan Gilbert, “*New Institutions for Democracy and Peace*”, Unpublished, p. 2

<sup>80</sup> See: Herbert Marcuse, “*Liberation from the affluent society*”, Papeles de Epistemología, La Escuela de Frankfurt, Universidad de las Americas, p. 27

'radical' critics of contemporary America, wrote: "No one can doubt the U.S. is powerful. But that is not everything the U.S. can be".<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Susan Sontag, "*Ataques Terroristas*", Revista Nexos, Octubre 2001, p. 29