
Multilateralism under challenge? Power, international order, and structural change

Edited by Edward Newman, Ramesh Thakur and
John Tirman

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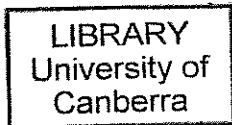


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Power and world order

Coral Bell

Beneath the most familiar map of the world, which is a map of the society of states, there lies another, less familiar, less mapped cosmopolitan world: that of "non-state actors". Almost impossible to map because it changes so quickly, and the entities which make it up are so variable: everything from the Red Cross to the jihadists. In the last few decades, its membership has been increasing fast, as has its ability to make an impact on the society of states. On 11 September 2001, a hidden hand reached up from that world to inflict savage trauma on the most powerful sovereign state in history.

That was a transformatory moment in the long search for order in a system of independent powers. What it signified was that the traditional sources of disorder – the ambitions and rivalries of sovereign states – were no longer the immediate problem. As late as the end of the twentieth century, it had been assumed that an international order could be based on just creating and maintaining a reasonably cooperative relationship among sovereign states, an effective rule of law, or at least some degree of consensus on norms and conventions between the governments which make the decisions for those states. In these early decades of the twenty-first century, the objective must be larger: to build a world order which will not only operate between existing sovereignties but also survive, contain and (when justified) even accommodate the pressures and tensions which arise from transnational forces. Forces which in many cases are generated by those who feel themselves disadvantaged by the existing order, excluded from its benefits, alienated by its norms – and determined to change it.

The world in which this effort must be undertaken is one in which power has recently been concentrated, to a degree unparalleled since Roman times, in a single sovereignty, and a single political elite, the decision-makers and policy-makers in Washington. That circumstance makes the United States the target not only of the resentment of many governments, but of active hatred among those who see it as the primary manipulator and beneficiary of the system which disadvantages them. And neither the massive high-tech military power in which the United States is unrivalled, nor the economic clout which it enjoys in abundance, are altogether effective against the global network of jihadist cells from which come the chief threats against the world order over which the United States presides.

So the problem resolves itself into four separate but related questions. How is consensus to be built and maintained between the contemporary sovereignties of the society of states, including especially those who do not feel they have much to be thankful for in the existing world establishment? What degree of cooperation can be devised to manage the transnational groups or forces which threaten that established order? What internal or external constraints could, over the next few decades, be effective against the paramount power of a unipolar world? Can contemporary international institutions be modified to serve those objectives more adequately?

A consensus of sovereignties: the jihadists as catalyst

The most important and only constructive side-effect of the challenge which the jihadists present to the existing society of states is that it has concentrated the attention of its national decision-makers on the survival of their own modes of governance, democratic or not. That is, the jihadists have operated as a powerful catalyst in diplomatic alignments, changing them without themselves being changed. Nothing is more conducive to consensus than a common enemy, and the jihadists are clearly that, especially for the most vulnerable of their targets, the governments of Muslim societies. Indeed the jihadists themselves, on the evidence of computer discs captured in Afghanistan, questioned whether their most useful strategy was to concentrate on "near" targets (vulnerable Muslim societies) or "far" targets like the United States, where the "payoff" in terms of publicity, funds and recruits is much greater. As former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once said, terrorists live on the oxygen of publicity, and currently they are exploiting it more ferociously than ever before. And they are helped (more than any earlier groups) by the explosion in the means of communication, especially the Internet.

The common consciousness among the society of states of unexpected danger from outside their own ranks has, for the time being at least promoted consciousness of the necessity of multilateralism and diminished the importance of what before 11 September 2001 appeared real and substantial conflicts of national interests. The most obvious and important of these are in the diplomatic and strategic relations between the United States and China. For the Pacific and Asia, the Washington-Beijing relationship became suddenly more benign than it had appeared since the *détente* of 1971-72.

During the first eight months of the Bush administration, that had appeared the least probable of developments. Indeed, for much of that time, the United States and China had seemed uncomfortably close to a collision course. A potential *casus belli* had been quite visible: the future status of Taiwan. Ever since the Kissinger-constructed *détente* of 1971-72, amicable relations had been maintained only by a careful, conscious, diplomatic ambiguity on that point. Soon after Bush assumed office, however, that ambiguity had begun to fray, sometimes appearing almost beyond repair. Taiwan's nationalist leader, Chen Shui-bian, seemed to be indicating that he believed that the time was propitious for seeking *de jure* (as against *de facto*) independence. Washington seemed to be going along with that ambition, providing Taiwan lavishly with advanced weapon systems. Bush himself declared that the United States would do everything necessary to help Taiwan defend itself. A US spy-plane was obliged to land on the Chinese island of Hainan in April 2003, and its crew were held captive by the Chinese military for some days. A little more imprudent crisis-management at that moment might have precipitated serious hostilities.

Both sides retreated from the brink in time, but China nevertheless continued to be defined in the Pentagon's terms as the most likely eventual "peer-competitor" of the United States, the only obvious replacement of the Soviet Union as prospective "national adversary number one". Strategic logic appeared almost to impose that view. Northeast Asia had been an area of spectacular economic growth for some decades, and China had become its "front runner" after the slowing of Japan in the 1990s. With almost unlimited low-cost labour, vast territory, substantial resources, an infrastructure approaching First World standards in some respects, and growing technological sophistication, China appeared only at the beginning of its rise to economic, diplomatic, and in time military power. No one could doubt that it had the potential to become a more formidable rival than Japan had ever been in East Asia and the Western Pacific. Indeed, to many people it appeared the natural claimant in geographical terms to be the hegemonial power of the region, since the United States is an ocean away, and (unlike China) might depart in time.

After 11 September 2001, however, the strategic priorities of the United States were revolutionized for the foreseeable future. The Pentagon's attention had to be directed towards a newly defined arc of crisis, the world of the jihadists, from North Africa round to the southern Philippines, via Afghanistan. Moreover homeland security became a more urgent and more expensive matter than it had been even during the Cold War. Though Soviet missiles might have reached the US heartland, the Soviet government could be (and was) deterred by superior US strike-power, and other factors, none of which applied to the jihadists. So the new threat generated a new and controversial strategy: pre-emption in place of (or in addition to) containment.

Chinese decision-makers may reasonably be assumed to have been relieved by the shift in the Pentagon's preoccupations away from their own region. Ability to sell into the US market is a vital economic asset to China in the drive to modernize its economy, and could have been prejudiced by continued high tension. The well-informed strategists of the PLA were unlikely to have been under any illusion that their forces were as yet in an advantageous position vis-à-vis even Taiwan, much less the Seventh Fleet. Moreover, China had its own reasons to worry about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia, and its implications for Xinjiang. That perhaps is why it accepted with what otherwise would have seemed astonishing equanimity a sharp deterioration of its own strategic position vis-à-vis the United States. Washington almost immediately replaced Beijing as Pakistan's most important ally. US forces moved not only into Afghanistan but in to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, almost encircling China's inner-Asian borders. Washington also worked harder on its relations with India (which still has an irredentist quarrel with China, from the 1962 war) and hastily concluded a strategic deal with Pakistan.

The primary compensation for China, to set against the deterioration of its overall strategic position, has been a redefinition of Washington's stance vis-à-vis Taiwan. In December 2003, while the Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, was visiting the White House, Bush said, in a blunt rebuke to Taipei, that "the comments and actions of the Taiwanese President, Chen Shui-bian, indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally that change the status quo. We oppose that." Given Taiwan's strategic dependence on Washington's protection, it appeared unlikely that any near-term decision-maker in Taipei would push his luck in near-future manoeuvres towards independence, even if endorsed by elections. Long-term, that position may change, but given the present rate of economic integration between Taiwan and the mainland, it seems quite possible that reintegration on more or less China's terms might occur before the end of Washington's concentration on the war with the jihadists.

For the entire Asia-Pacific area, the stability of the United States-China relationship is a vital concern. So even the prospect of postponement of one potential conflict is welcome, though others are emerging.

Since 11 September 2001, the United States has another strong reason for giving higher priority to a good relationship with China: the need to curb the nuclear ambitions of North Korea. Only China has the means to exert really persuasive pressure in that country, since it provides its main lifeline in food and fuel. Though there have been some doubts in expert quarters of the reality of North Korea's development of nuclear weapons, it appears at least probable that it is further along that road than the other main target of the US counter-proliferation policy, Iran.

Counter-proliferation is moreover one aspect of United States policy that most governments can regard with at least surreptitious approval. No acknowledged member of the nuclear club (the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, India, Pakistan and Israel) wants to see new members of that exclusive grouping, and practically all the other members of the society of states have abandoned ambitions in that regard. Even Iran maintains that its nuclear facilities are aimed only at power-generation, though many find that implausible. Persuading North Korea to give up on nuclear weapons would be an important symbolic milestone. Even ideologically, one can see less reason than in the past for tension between the United States and China. Though officially China is still a communist country, and is certainly ruled by a Politburo, and still very intolerant of those like the Falun Gong who dissent from the official norms, Deng Xiao-ping's maxim "to get rich is glorious" is now much more dominant in national life than "Leninism-Stalinism-Mao Tse-tung Thought", and it is a maxim any US capitalist could endorse. Chinese nationalism seems these days the intellectual and emotional driving force of the political elite. That might obviously provide reasons to challenge Western interests and Western power in the region, but it is not precisely a banner that attracts revolutionary movements elsewhere, as Maoism used to do, for instance, in Nepal and Latin America.

For Washington's relations with Moscow as well, the abandonment of any kind of alternative world vision based on Marxist analysis eased the way to governmental consensus about international order, and the most immediate threat to it. So, like China, in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, Russia showed little or no resistance to the sudden assertion of US strategic interest in the ex-Soviet states of Central Asia. American and other Western interest in the oil resources of the area now rival those of China and Russia. But both Chinese and Russian tolerance of that situation appeared to be fraying by late 2005.¹

The United States and China, or the United States and Russia, were not the only potential or actual "adversary pairs" who suddenly discov-

ered the advantages of détente in the face of a new threat. India and Pakistan, which for more than fifty years had lived in a state of endemic tension, rising at times to full-scale war, have been on rather more hopeful terms since the threat posed by the jihadists became clearer to them both. For each it is an internal as well as an international issue. India has one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, after Indonesia, and must also be concerned with those of Pakistan and Bangladesh. South and Southeast Asia's Muslims, in total, vastly outnumber those of the rest of the world, so their orientations, for or against the jihadists, are likely to be of vital importance in the outcome of the jihadists' war. The government of President Musharraf in Pakistan found a useful ally in Washington, and the United States a strategically vital one in Pakistan, for as long as the Afghanistan campaign persists, but the orientation of many Pakistanis is profoundly anti-American, and the President is a much-threatened man.

Unfortunately the original post-11 September 2001 diplomatic consensus was disrupted after only a year. By September 2002, as the US Secretary of State was developing his case at the United Nations on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, most governments and their peoples had become deeply critical of the unfolding strategy of the United States, especially the clear intent by then to effect "regime change" in Iraq. Few other decision-makers were prepared to see that as a sensible approach to dealing with the problem of the jihadists. So the Anglo-American resolution of March 2003, seeking United Nations legitimation for the invasion of Iraq, had to be withdrawn, not merely because it was certain to be vetoed by France, but because it was quite likely to fail to obtain a simple majority of the Security Council, several of whose members would earlier have been regarded as client states of the United States. Nevertheless, the basic point that most of the traditional rivalries which have threatened world order in the past have been "put on the back-burner", as governments contemplate the new challenge, remains true. The arguments between governments have been about strategies and definitions, not objectives.

Defining the challenge to world order

Since 11 September 2001, official Washington has used the phrase "war on terrorism" to describe the policies it has pursued, and is pursuing, in reaction to that intensely traumatic event. But that phrase, however convenient for politicians, does not really convey much about the nature of the threat to world order. "The jihadists' war" is more precise.² Terrorism is both their strategy and their tactic, but it is not exclusive to them. It

has been used over many years by a great many political movements. Almost all those past and present groups have however been seeking change only in local political or territorial arrangements, or governmental reform of some sort. The jihadists are different. Their objective is global, not local; nothing short of the transformation of power relationships in world politics, and thus overturning the existing world order.

That is to say, the challenge is not merely to the United States, but to the society of states: the contemporary world establishment and its governments as a group, including even a fundamentalist Islamic state such as Saudi Arabia. The choice of the United States and, in particular, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, as targets was nevertheless significant. They were the prime symbols of the economic and military ascendancy of the United States as the paramount power of a unipolar world. In other words, the most obvious icons of the late twentieth-century world order, which the jihadists believe they have a duty to overturn.

President Bush, at the beginning of his 2004 campaign for re-election, absent-mindedly deviated into realism and candour when he said to an interviewer that the "war on terrorism" could not be won. Obviously, acts of terrorism are always going to be possible to those who know enough chemistry to put together a home-made bomb (like Timothy McVeigh, or the "Unabomber") or even to those who can acquire a rifle (like the Washington snipers). Though Bush hastily retracted his words, they remained true. Terrorism cannot be defeated because it will always be an option to those who believe that their grievances against a government are important enough to resort to violence. But the jihadists as an organized coherent force can be defeated, though it will be difficult. Defining the conflict as "the jihadists' war" has thus the advantage of making the target specific, and of restricting it to its real dimensions. The adversary is not Islamism, or Islamic fundamentalism. Those terms denote only religious or political orientations. The jihadists are those who see themselves as "on active service" in an asymmetric war against the current global order.

A parallel from the past

Several factors clearly distinguish the jihadists' war from the last protracted conflict faced by the West, the Cold War, 1946-89. The importance and reality of the differences between the two conflicts should not, however, be allowed to obscure the points of resemblance. Both are hegemonial wars: wars about the order of power in the world. Both are also wars of doctrine, wars about the norms on which societies should be

ordered. In both, the whole world is the battle space, but some areas are more vital and vulnerable than others – in the Cold War, Central Europe and Northeast Asia; in the current conflict, probably Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the North Caucasus. The jihadists believe they will prevail because Allah is on their side. The revolutionaries of 1917 and their successors, up to Khrushchev's time, believed that they would prevail because history was on their side.

Even the developmental sequence of the two conflicts has been so far quite similar. In both, there have been two actual military campaigns: Korea and Vietnam in the Cold War, Afghanistan and Iraq in the conflict with the jihadists. In both struggles, the earlier of those campaigns was a "necessary war", forced on the West by surprise attacks – in June 1950 for Korea and, on 11 September 2001, by a far more unforeseen adversary. But the other two campaigns, Vietnam and Iraq, were unnecessary wars, "wars of choice". No area vital to the West was under attack. The strategic importance of Vietnam was grossly exaggerated in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Washington, just as the strategic "necessity" of getting rid of Saddam's illusory weapons of mass destruction was in 2002–2003. In both campaigns, the "domino concept" made its misleading appearance, alleged to be the other side's strategy for Southeast Asia in the Vietnam case, and actually the strategic rationale of the neoconservatives in the Iraq case. (Iraq was seen by Washington "insiders" as "the first domino", whose toppling by military action would have a "knock on effect" throughout the entire Arab world.) The Cold War lasted 43 years as far as conscious Western containment was concerned, but the underlying conflict had begun in 1917, so 72 years in all. Similarly, a conscious Western strategy to meet the jihadists' war was not really formulated until after 11 September 2001, but the adversaries' campaign had been under way at least since 1982, according to Osama bin Laden's account in his video just before the US election. We will be lucky if the contemporary overall conflict is any shorter than the Cold War.

Those reflections on some parallels between the Cold War and the current conflict are not intended in any way to diminish the importance of the most vital difference between them. The Cold War was a conflict between sovereign states, drawn up in two heavily armed alliances. The jihadists' war is a conflict between the society of states as a whole and a worldwide loosely connected network of terrorist cells, using effectively and very ruthlessly the tactics of asymmetric war.

The choice of strategies

Nevertheless, the similarities listed appear to suggest that the strategy which saw the West through to victory in the Cold War might have

some usefulness in this new conflict. That has not been Washington's official view. The National Security Strategy of 2002 proclaimed that containment must be replaced by pre-emption, because, as the National Security Adviser famously said, if the United States waited for the "smoking gun", it might prove to be a "mushroom cloud". That evocation of the nuclear image as a weapon that might be available to the jihadists was no doubt politically shrewd in reconciling the US public to the notion that war on Iraq without a *casus belli* was legitimate in the interests of US security. But it is difficult to see that anything at all was "pre-empted" by the invasion of Iraq. It could more accurately be described as a preventive war, since in intent and effect it was really "a shot across the bows" for the Arab world as a whole, a warning of what might happen to any of them if they provoked enough rage in Washington.

In that, it has been relatively successful. Libya has been the "poster boy" for change. Syria made an exit from Lebanon, but remained in 2005 under heavy diplomatic pressure. Egypt and even Saudi Arabia have made gestures towards democracy. The objective of effecting a democratic revolution in the Arab world is one difficult to quarrel with openly, even for a practising autocrat. But US strategy is questionable. Can democracy really be exported on Abrams tanks? The analogy of change in Germany and Japan in the aftermath of defeat in the Second World War is quite misleading. By 1945, both Germany and Japan were in states of total exhaustion and incapable of further resistance, which is far from the case with the Arab world, or even Iraq, as has been well demonstrated. Despite the absence of jungles, the parallel with Vietnam is much closer, with urban guerrilla warfare the primary tactic of the local nationalist insurgents, as well as the jihadists, and the great-power backing given by the Soviet Union and China replaced by the militants in the worldwide Islamic community.

A rational and defensible foreign policy requires the prudent choice of lesser evils. Though Saddam's continuance in power would no doubt have been a source of many evils, his removal by outside military force created greater ones, at least in the short term, and possibly in the very long term. Estimates of the Iraqi dead range from 20,000 to 100,000. Add more than 2,000 Americans and other "outsiders" dead, many more wounded or disabled, massive destruction in Iraq, damage to US diplomatic standing all over the world, a heavy financial burden on the US taxpayer, a great deal of blind hatred for the United States and the West in general in the Islamic world. Above all, for the long term, an increased chance of the jihadists' war possibly turning into the worst possible outcome, a war of civilizations.

So, on any reasonable cost-benefit analysis, the one clear benefit of the war so far, Saddam's removal, was dearly bought, especially if it turns

him in time to a martyr for Arab nationalism. The necessity for a less expensive strategy became apparent by 2004, even to some of those who espoused the theory of Iraq as the first domino. There was an echo, by 2005, of Dulles' time as Secretary of State in the early 1950s. He had come to office denouncing the allegedly "ineffective" and "cowardly" policy of containment, and proposing an instant recipe for success: the "roll-back" of Soviet power in Eastern Europe by promoting democratic revolutions there. That strategy did not outlast the first feeble attempt, in East Germany in 1953. So there was then a quiet return to containment which finally delivered success, as its original theorist had predicted back in 1946.³ Admittedly it took a long time, but 40 years on there did occur the "erosion" and "mellowing" of Soviet power originally claimed as the eventual outcome of "a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment".

The concept as originally formulated should not be equated with its later military expression in the deployment of troops in central Korea and Western Germany. Any such geographical conception is obviously irrelevant on the context of an adversary whose cells are worldwide, including in some of the cities of the West. But the power to do damage can be contained, limited and eventually eroded in a variety of ways.

Before the decision to invade Iraq, that did seem to be happening on various fronts. The prospect of further proliferation of nuclear "know-how", and maybe fissile material, was inhibited by pressure on Pakistan (the chief actual source) and by close cooperation with Russia in the safeguarding of Soviet-era nuclear "assets". The flow of funds to the jihadists was diminished by blocking their sources, chiefly in Saudi Arabia, and improved checks on money-laundering. The Saudis, after the realization of their own vulnerability, found the resolve to put some restraints on the sermons in radical mosques, and the curricula in radical schools. Other Muslim countries may in time be able to follow that lead. The counter-proliferation campaign appears to be having some effect on its two main targets, North Korea and Iran, mostly through multilateral diplomacy, in the Six-Power Talks for North Korea, and the IAEA for Iran. The failed or failing states deemed by richer neighbours likely to be unable to prevent jihadist cells from establishing training-bases on their territories suddenly found themselves being offered substantial help to establish more effective police and armed forces. Intelligence agencies worldwide, whose past traditions had been of fierce rivalry even with domestic competitors for "turf" (as, for instance, between the FBI and the CIA) suddenly found themselves under orders to cooperate not only with them, but foreign rivals. Many intelligence agencies suddenly were more lavishly funded, new sorts of linguists were hastily trained, and global cooperation became the "in-thing" and seemed to be producing results. Above

all, the jihadists by 2004 had lost the enormous strategic advantages of being underrated, and largely lost the advantage of surprise, save on the tactical level of choice of target and timing.

One of the least-noticed aspects of the Western victory in the Cold War has a paradoxical but cheering implication for the current conflict. Military success (or rather the lack of it) in that earlier protracted conflict had little visible influence on its outcome. Both Korea and Vietnam ended very disappointingly for the West. Korea was at best a stalemate: the lines of confrontation remained much what they had been; the northern tyrant was not removed, but like any monarch passed his power to his son. After more than 50 years there is still not even a treaty, and the threat to the South, and now even to the world in general, is rather greater than it was in 1950. Certainly that is the case if the North Korean regime has really managed in the meantime to produce nuclear weapons, as well as missiles than can deliver them. Vietnam in 1975 looked even worse: an unmitigated and undisguisable disaster, the enemy taking over the contested territory. But the West's relations with Hanoi are now much better than those with Pyongyang.

Even the balance of forces, in terms of the actual military status of the two sides in 1989, did not really indicate the eventual outcome. As the Wall came down and the Soviet Union began to vanish into history, Soviet soldiers still stood from the centre of Germany to the far reaches of Afghanistan. More than enough of its nuclear missiles were deployed on near-invulnerable platforms. Its armouries were crammed with tanks and artillery. So what was eroding was not actual military capacity or strategic assets, but the will of the Soviet political elite to use them. That reflection is relevant to the possible eventual fading of the conflict with the jihadists.

Nothing fails like failure. What happened in Moscow was a sort of generation-by-generation change in the norms and assumptions of the political elite. Khrushchev was probably the last "true believer". He once affably assured Eisenhower that their grandchildren would play together as Communists, come the bright new dawn. His first three successors, Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko, seem to represent a declining curve of optimism on that point. How else could Gorbachev have come to power? The thirty years between the advent of Khrushchev in the mid-1950s, and that of Gorbachev in the mid-1980s, might be seen as the necessary time-lapse for the slow process of erosion of the Stalinist norms (such as they were) and their replacement by others.

To sum up a hypothesis that requires much more historical background than can be provided in this chapter, containment, détente, engagement and normative shift did their slow-motion work. And the Soviet Union relinquished its original aspirations to overturn the earlier order of power

in the society of states.⁴ The jihadists now hold that aspiration as fiercely as the revolutionaries of 1917 once did. But, though the Cold War lasted 43 years, its intensity diminished after its most dangerous point, the Cuba Missile crisis of 1962. Despite a final upsurge of tension in 1983, it ended just six years later, in 1989. Some downturn towards diminished hostilities may be likely, though for different reasons, in the jihadists' war.

The diplomacy of the Gorbachev–Reagan period, 1985–88, was important in the final winding-down of the Cold War without a shot being fired. If there is to be any equivalent of the Gorbachev role in the jihadists' war, it would probably have to be by a group of very senior Sunni and Shia clerics. The radical young clerics of the current period, like al-Sadr, as is clear from his 2005 policies in Iraq, are quite conscious that the Shia have a lot to gain from a genuine transition to electoral politics there, since they are a 60 per cent majority. But the Sunni, who have lost a lot with the fall of the old regime, must also be reconciled. The current global conflict is in essence a struggle for the soul of Islam between the "zealots" and the "modernizers". The United States and the West in general, are seen as the "Great Satan" because Satan is seen as the "great tempter", luring the young away from traditional Islamic norms. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Christendom went through a somewhat similar struggle, international and domestic wars arising in part from doctrinal differences. It came out of that disastrous period in 1648, with the Peace of Westphalia – and in time also with the Enlightenment, and the norm that religion should not dictate domestic political structure, still less international politics. There are plenty of Islamic intellectuals and clerics who could in time mediate that thought to their fellow Muslims. But the West cannot impose the evolution by tanks and bombers.

Power, order and unipolarity

The point was made earlier that one of the fringe effects of the jihadists' war was to induce solidarity among the governments who represent the society of states. Every existing government, as of 2005, had reason to feel that its citizenry, or its interests, were in some way damaged by the jihadists' campaign. The governments of Muslim societies, above all others, have reason to fear that even their very survival may be at stake. None of them wants to see itself replaced by a Taliban-style regime. In countries like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, where a substantial sector of the population (judging by the street protests and slogans) share the norms, assumptions and aspirations of the jihadists, their jeopardy is a

strategic danger also for the West. But many of the supporters or even the members of those governments may in their hearts agree with the jihadists, at least to the extent of seeing the existing international order as an order of entrenched injustice, created by the West, and likely to be perpetuated unless something is done to pull it down.

In effect, therefore, the restoration of a viable world order may depend on the reform of the international order. As a global task, that is somewhat less formidable than the task of defeating the jihadists, because it involves essentially only the decision-makers of those political elites who are in office or prospect of office, among the major powers. Defeating the jihadists, unfortunately, involves changing the world-view of many Muslims: the young men who may decide to go "on active service" as jihadists, and the elderly clerics and teachers who form the opinions of those possible recruits. Even if only one tenth of one per cent of the billion-plus Muslim citizens of the world decide for jihad, that would produce more than a million potential "foot-soldiers". The crucial group however are the mostly middle-class intellectuals, many of them educated in the West, who lead the foot-soldiers, plan their operations and raise their funds. So it is primarily that group that must be influenced.

At its advent, the chief virtue of the unipolar world seemed to be that logically it made war much less likely between sovereign states. Hegemonic wars (like the First and Second World Wars, and the Cold War), were deemed impossible while it lasted. That was just a matter of definition, since a unipolar world was defined as one in which the paramount power faced no direct military challenge from any "peer-competitor" in the traditional form of another sovereign state, or alliance of states. Hardly anyone, even in the intelligence services, contemplated the then improbable scenario of the challenge coming from a "non-state actor", a worldwide web of jihadists' cells. But in terms of traditional international relations theory, those cells now constitute the "revisionist power," challenging the world "establishment". That does raise a few historical echoes, mainly of the challenge to legitimacy in the mid-nineteenth century, or the anarchist movement towards its end, or the far-left terrorists of the 1960s and 1970s. But none of them was anything like so formidable as the present global network of cells, and unfortunately, zealotry in the name of a religious doctrine may prove far more durable than that based on economic or political assumptions.

As far as the durability of the unipolar world is concerned, the erosion of America's economic power has been the usual argument for predicting its end. On that basis, the end is by no means near. Even though the United States spent more on military goods and services than the next twenty major powers combined, that absorbed only 4 or 5 per cent of its GNP. At the height of the Cold War, for comparison, it was spending

more than 14 per cent of a much smaller GNP. However America's vast military capacity is still geared to fight a conventional or nuclear war against a sovereign state, or an alliance of states. Against a non-state actor, in an asymmetric war, it has not been doing as well as the strategists responsible for the doctrines on which the Iraq invasion was launched had originally hoped. But the strategic advantages of the United States' geographic position, with wide oceans to east and west, and militarily non-competitive neighbours to north and south, though slightly eroded by technology, remained far greater than Rome enjoyed in its time. The jihadists have obviously the capacity to inflict grief and loss on the American people, and considerable economic damage, but there is no conceivable way they could achieve an actual direct military victory.

The crucial damage to US power since the decision to invade Iraq is elsewhere: to its capacity to induce bandwagoning. Both its formal alliance structure and its diplomatic reputation have taken a considerable battering. But Iraq has not been the sole reason for the rise of anti-Americanism as a sort of political ideology over more of the world than has ever been affected by Islam, and even among the citizenry of its two closest allies, Britain and Australia. The mere fact of unipolarity invites resentment of the paramount power. Every other society has to reflect wryly from time to time that all sovereignties may be theoretical equals, but for the time being one is a great deal more equal than all the others. In the old days of the multipolar balance, resentments at national inequalities could at least be divided among several great powers. Now it is all directed towards Washington, seen as the self-selected manager of the world, and as managing it very badly. In the case of Iraq, inventing a crisis (those non-existent WMDs) as a rationale for regime change, which in reality was sought on the basis of an imprudent, over-ambitious determination to convert the Arab world to instant democracy.

Balance or concert?

Despite the much-resented unilateralism of the period since about 2003, there is one fully-unilateral decision by Washington that could transform the diplomatic disfavour in which it found itself in the Bush second term. The next administration could decide to administer the unipolar world as if it were a concert of powers.

That old European concept has never recovered in the United States from the rather unfair "bad press" it got in Woodrow Wilson's time, during and after the First World War. But with the advantage of retrospect, it is now clear that it did better in restraining and limiting wars between

the great powers for the whole hundred years 1815–1914 than the system which succeeded it, and which Wilson himself sponsored.⁵ No hegemonial wars occurred in the Concert period, whereas in the 75 years which followed, 1914–1989, there were three hegemonial wars (the First and Second World Wars, and the Cold War, which was the form of the Third World War). Now the world has a fourth, the jihadists' war, which also is a struggle about the order of power in the world.

The most reasonable charge against the old European Concert is that it allowed the major powers of the time – Britain, France, Russia, the Kaiser's Germany, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium – to annex large swathes of Africa, Asia, and the Islamic countries to their respective empires. But any new concert of powers must of course be global, and indeed its major function would be to allow the emerging great powers of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Islamic world to move more easily to their rightful places in the diplomatic sun, "centre stage" in the world order.

That process could, and theoretically should, take place through the formal institutions of the society of states, like the Security Council. India and Japan, for instance, have long been irritated by their failure to be offered permanent places on that body, and Brazil has lately joined them. The difficulty is that formal structures like the United Nations almost inevitably enshrine long established legal privileges, like the veto, reflecting the order of power at the time they were established. So the Security Council in 2005 still reflected the power balance of 1945. Some of the nations thus originally privileged were never likely to be ready to share that status with a larger group, as the hopeful reform proposal of 2005 had suggested.

Informal structures, like the old Concert, or the current G7, are much more able to expand their membership when it is economically or diplomatically useful to do so. The G7, for instance, becomes the G8, with the addition of Russia. In 2004 it included China, an overdue gesture, considering the economic importance of that country. It could readily become the G12 anytime the current members decide to issue the invitations. And it does not have to confine its agenda to economic matters. When presidents and prime ministers get together informally, they can and should discuss whatever is important to the world.

Some Americans have hoped to prolong unipolarity for the indefinite future, or at least the end of the century, but not even the most Machiavellian operator in the Pentagon is likely to be able to bring that off. The issue will be settled far outside the corridors of power in Washington by the ineluctable forces of demographic and economic change. China is already putting on economic power and diplomatic influence with notable speed, and building military capacity. India is beginning to catch up. In-

Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, along with India, represent the majority of the world's Muslims, and their future orientation will be crucial for order in the world. Japan may at last be coming out of its long stagnation, and with the rise of China will be obliged to re-think its options. Latin America is beginning to produce candidates for great power status, like Brazil and Mexico. Despite its long string of disasters, Africa also is producing future contenders, in powers like Nigeria and South Africa.

So what used (rather condescendingly) to be called the Third World is catching up, economically and technologically, with the advanced world. Demographically it is far outdoing it. World population is expected to stabilize by mid-century at about 9 billion, and fertility rates to converge, a bit later, at about replacement level (2.1). But in the interim, about 85 per cent of the world's peoples will be non-Westerners. Though America's own population is not expected to decline (indeed to grow to about 400 million) those of its European allies and Japan will age and diminish. So Washington by mid-century will have to share the governance of the world with sovereignties from cultures vastly different from its own. The next two or three decades, while the society of states remains at least militarily unipolar though diplomatically and economically it will be reverting to multipolarity, could thus be regarded as opportunity for a "learning curve", or a useful sort of "practice session": administering the world as if it were a concert of powers, before the changing distribution of power makes it mandatory.

That old diplomatic technique, in the nineteenth century, had as one of its prime objectives, to preserve "the repose of Europe". For the future, that would of course be amended to promoting the repose (peace and security) of the whole world. A potential multipolar world of perhaps twelve great powers (the United States, Europe, China, India, Russia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, maybe Egypt and South Africa, if population, regional influence and economic growth-rates are any guide) could arrange itself as either a balance of power, as in the eighteenth century, or a concert of powers as in the nineteenth century. It may instantly be objected that the United Nations is a better and more recent model. Agreed, and I would expect it to remain the formal and legal structure, with a sort of "updating" in only one vital eventual membership, that of the Security Council. Its importance as a symbol of sovereignty for those nations which cannot hope for great power status will remain crucial. But it would be difficult to deny that the whole 60 years of the United Nations' existence have been dominated by either the bipolar balance of the Cold War, or the current paramouncy of the United States.

Despite the formal legal authority of the Security Council, decisions for peace or war are in reality still made by governments, on the basis of

their assumptions about their national interests. The institutions in which they come closest to collective decisions about such vital matters are security communities. The NATO decision, just after 11 September 2001, to invoke its principle that "an attack on one is an attack on all" (even if not fully exemplified in the actual military commitments to Afghanistan of all its members) was at least an approximation to collective security: a "league against the unknown enemy", as it used to be called. No enemy could have been more unknown and unexpected than the Taliban.

For a variety of historical reasons, no anti-hegemonial alliance was ever constructed against the United States in its long rise to paramouncy, 1898–1992. But the prospective new distribution of power will make one far more likely, and would enable a very much larger and more potent alliance to be created than ever in the past. During the worst moments of the Iraq crisis, in 2003, one could see its potential shape hovering in the diplomatic air. Only Tony Blair, of the major decision-makers of the society of states, seemed fully on the side of Washington, and still a true believer in the trans-Atlantic bond. So one of the most significant side-effects of the Iraq crisis was to make more visible the potential tug-of-war over the future of Europe: partner or competitor to the United States? As two eminent US political scientists have written "the preservation of an Atlantic zone of stable peace – the establishment of which is perhaps the greatest achievement of the twentieth century – is in question, with balance-of-power dynamics returning to relations between the United States and Europe".⁶ The strategic necessities which produced the alliance in 1949 have been gone since 1989. Europe now faces no security challenge other than the jihadists, and a lot of Europeans believe (mistakenly) that severing the trans-Atlantic bond would exempt them from its dangers. The young assume (again perhaps mistakenly) that Stalin and Hitler are less relevant to their future than Charlemagne. President Chirac never bothers to disguise his nostalgia for the multipolar world.

But events do not have to move in that Gaullist direction, nor should they. It would produce a multipolar balance of at least eight nuclear powers (the United States, China, Russia, India, Pakistan, France, Britain and Israel) and probably more. A large potential for catastrophe would reside in that. The decisions taken in Washington in the next few years are what will determine whether the society of states moves towards a complex and dangerous multipolar balance of power, or a more stable and conflict-limiting concert of powers.

Nothing could have appeared more improbable at the outset of the second Bush term than the idea of a global concert. Yet, at the beginning of the second Reagan term, nothing was less expected than that the Cold War was moving towards its end, "not with a bang but a whimper". And

at the beginning of the second Nixon term, everything in the two years that followed would have appeared just political-science fantasy. So the possibility of radical surprise should never be discounted. As the second Bush administration began moving into history in 2006, that principle seemed a useful one.

Notes

1. By late 2005, the Shanghai Cooperation Group, which appears to express the common interest of Russia and China in limiting US influence in Central Asia (and was joined for that meeting by India, Pakistan and Iran), was enquiring tartly when the United States proposed to wind up its bases there, and Uzbekistan had given Washington six months' notice to quit.
2. The word "jihadist" has several meanings in Islamic thought. It can mean just the moral struggle of the individual to live by the tenets of the Prophet. But the meaning for those who would at the moment be defined as jihadists is (in the words of the cleric who inspired the first attempt (1993) to blow up the Twin Towers is "do jihad with the sword, with the cannon, with the grenades, with the missiles ... to break and destroy the enemies of Allah ... their high buildings ... and the buildings in which they gather their leaders". Quoted in "America and the New Terrorism", *Survival* 42(1) Spring 2000.
3. George F. Kennan, writing while he was Counsellor at the US Embassy in Moscow in 1946, in a cable replying to an inquiry by the then Defense Secretary, asking what Stalin was up to. The cable was published under the title "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" by "Mr X" in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, and had an enormous intellectual influence on policy makers, even more in Europe than in the United States. For an account of this period in Washington, see Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas (1986) *The Wise Men*, New York: Simon and Shuster.
4. The collapse of the Soviet Union was not adequately foreseen by Sovietologists, and still needs many more studies. Some authorities theorize that it was due to over-confidence on Gorbachev's part. He believed that the system could survive the impact of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, but events proved him wrong.
5. For an American "take" on the nineteenth-century concert, by an analyst very familiar with the problems of US foreign policy, see Henry Kissinger (1994) *Diplomacy*, New York: Simon and Shuster), and also his earlier work, *A World Restored*, New York: Grosset and Dunlop (Universal Library edition).
6. See "Liberal realism: the foundations of a democratic foreign policy" by G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan (2004) in *The National Interest* 77, Fall.

6

Multilateralism, sovereignty and normative change in world politics

Amitav Acharya

This chapter examines the role of multilateralism in fostering and managing normative change in world politics, with specific regard to the fundamental norms of state sovereignty.¹ Post-war multilateralism helped to define, extend, embed and legitimize a set of sovereignty norms, including territorial integrity, equality of states and nonintervention. Today, multilateral institutions are under increasing pressure to move beyond some of these very same principles, especially nonintervention, as part of a transformative process in world politics. Without multilateralism, it is highly doubtful that the post-war international order would have been so tightly and universally built upon the norms of sovereignty. And without multilateralism, argues this chapter, transition from this normative order now would be difficult and chaotic, as may be already happening as a result of the Bush administration's challenge to the current multilateral system.

I begin by briefly outlining the idea of norms and normative change. Then, I offer an overview of the role of multilateralism, both at the global and regional levels, in promoting the norms of sovereignty in the post-war period. Next, I outline the pressures for normative change being faced by multilateral institutions in recent years. Finally, the chapter analyses how multilateralism is promoting normative change, with particular reference to the norm of nonintervention.