

The United States: the empire of force or the force of empire?

Pierre Hassner



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One year on, what has America become? That question has perturbed Washington's partners ever since the attacks of 11 September. Indeed, within the Union, the Europeans have reacted to America's responses to terrorism as much as they have to the terrorist threat itself. They have done so with a mixture of instinctive solidarity and growing scepticism over the policy being pursued by Washington. And they have looked on with both fascination and incomprehension at the political agitation that, whether it concerns Afghanistan or Iraq, mobilisation against terrorism or rejection of the International Criminal Court, obsession with military technology or scarcity of political vision, is upsetting all the previous certainties and traditional givens in the transatlantic debate. Is the United States evolving on another planet and in a different frame of reference from the Europeans? Have the attacks of 11 September led to a total break in America's relations with the outside world, or are there, in US strategic heritage and culture, lines of continuity that provide a better understanding, if not approval, of America's new reactions to force and the use of force in international relations?

Who better than Pierre Hassner, at present research director emeritus at the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, Fondation nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris, to combine a breadth of strategic vision and close acquaintance with the United States – particularly the current personalities in the Bush administration – in order to answer those questions? In this brilliant essay the author, who was a senior visiting fellow at the Institute last year, analyses and dissects, from the American Civil War to the Korean War, from containment of the Soviet Union to the war on terrorism, the political and technological ingredients of American unilateralism and exceptionalism today. 'From total war to war without risk and now war without rules', this Chaillot Paper examines the history of America's very special attitude to the use of force, at the three levels that are determinant in all policy-making: public opinion, the military hierarchy and the political élites that have successively been in charge of America's destiny.

Having become 'vulnerable . . . yet at the same time invincible', 'absolutely against any encroachment on their sovereignty but absolutely in

favour of their own intervention against others', America post-11 September is again posing the eternal challenge to Europeans of how to reconcile principles and realism, law and the use of force. That should finally make the Europeans engage in a common assessment of the world in the terrorist era, at the very least, but especially of possible complementarity between American and European power, if there is still time for such a union of opposites.

Paris, July 2002

Introduction

The United States:
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There is no society or policy that does not have its contradictions, but some have more than others, and that is certainly true of the United States. Raymond Aron evoked a classic paradox in giving his book on the United States the title *The Imperial Republic*.¹ That paradox has two aspects. Firstly, are the republic's institutions (which are designed to guarantee citizens' rights and a separation of powers) suited to the running of an empire, or are they prejudicial to the decision-making ability and continuity that that implies? Conversely, does not the expenditure on empire, in terms of resources and time, and in particular the methods used to acquire and preserve it, affect the economic, political and moral health of the republican homeland? These dilemmas are made even more acute since, on the one hand, this is not a classic empire, like that of Rome, but rather a bourgeois, individualist one based on the acquisition of wealth rather than the winning of wars and, on the other hand, this is the first truly world-wide empire and has appeared at a moment when the threats facing humankind raise key questions on the interests of the international system and the planet itself, over and above those of the 'hyperpower'.

Last, and foremost for the issue examined here, the tensions (and the contradictory ways of resolving them) that all states are having to face today more than at other times, and the United States more than other states, raise the question of the use of force. Between the negative, Hobbesian vision of a war of all against all and the positive, Christian utopia of a universal rejection of violence, the compromise reached by modern states and still accepted by Raymond Aron in *Peace and War*² has consisted in maintaining a monopoly on the use of force within the state and reserving the right to employ it externally in the form of war. That fragile compromise has now been shattered: war between states has become very unlikely, even unthinkable in certain cases for a number of reasons, whereas civil wars and violence in society have become more widespread. That is particularly clear in the case of the

1. Raymond Aron, *The Imperial Republic. The United States and the World 1945-1973* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975).

2. Raymond Aron, *Peace and War. A Theory of International Relations* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967).

United States, whose imperial status blurs the distinction between the domestic and the inter-state. Indeed the US case includes specific paradoxes, and the problems to which these lead will be examined in this paper.

The United States is subjected to and tolerates far more violence internally than most other modern states, as is seen in the non-prohibition of firearms and maintenance of the death penalty, yet is much less willing to risk its servicemen's lives abroad, endeavouring to reduce casualties through resort to technology or the use of allies. Whereas traditionally colonial powers have used auxiliary or local troops and maritime powers have engaged allies, placing its faith in technology as an alternative to physical risk is characteristic of the United States, a power that is more advanced than others in its modern or bourgeois concept of society, whereas the right of the individual to bear arms to defend himself and capital punishment hark back to a pre-modern past that remains very much more deep-rooted than elsewhere.

However, this paradoxical combination of tradition and modernity, of attachment to the past and futurism, seems, like that of internal violence and the use of force externally, to have been fundamentally modified by the shock of 11 September. US reactions to the events of that day of course confirm certain trends that are permanent or had appeared during previous years, for example America's preference for military solutions despite its great superiority in other fields, and a growing feeling of both vulnerability and invincibility. Yet on other issues, like the abhorrence of lasting external engagements, the refusal to take risks, attachment to the rule of law or like the divisions in society, the terrorist attacks have led to spectacular changes of attitude. A society whose tendency to fragmentation and withdrawal was often lamented, is becoming one that is united in its fight against the terrorist enemy and its supporters in all corners of the world.

Of course this society, and in particular its actions, continues to be subject to tensions and to pursue conflicting objectives, but the way in which these contradictions are perceived or concealed, managed or resolved, has in a way been inverted.

One thus understands the dialectic of the permanent and changing features that characterise US history in particular. The tensions are always there, but there are periods when they lead to paralysis, others when they result in effective compromise and yet others when there is an abrupt swing from one extreme to the other.

Some authors have thus claimed to detect cycles in American foreign policy,³ with swings from isolationism or withdrawal to expansionism and internationalism. According to this school of thought, following the activism of the Cold War period and the withdrawal following the defeat in Vietnam, Ronald Reagan ushered in a period of US reaffirmation ('America is back!' replacing 'Come Home America!'), a theme taken up again and extended by George W. Bush after the more timid transitional presidencies of George Bush Snr and Bill Clinton (although there were forceful aspects in both – on the diplomatic and military fronts in the case of Bush, with the achievement of German unification and victory in the Gulf war, and on an economic and ideological level with Clinton and his commitment to free trade and the promotion of democracy in the world).

To accept such reasoning, however, would be to yield to a somewhat mechanical determinism and take little account of external attacks on the United States (Pearl Harbor, 11 September) and real emergencies and threats (the two World Wars, Hitler, Stalin, terrorism), which the United States did not invent. The fact remains, however, that the response to those shocks was largely a function of a feeling of power and dynamism resulting from internal US developments, particularly economic and technological. 11 September (like the sinking of the battleship *Maine*, which led to the war against Spain) happened at the end of a period of impressive growth in the United States. A section of the American élite was dying to see that internal growth translated into a more triumphalist or dominating foreign policy. The neo-imperial theme and reference to Theodore Roosevelt were being nurtured by a section of the American political right but seemed relatively marginal. The shock of 11 September and the apparent ease with which victory was achieved in Afghanistan seemingly gave them resonance and legitimacy. It is the combination of, firstly, a new feeling of vulnerability, secondly, moral indignation at the gratuitous hostility of one part of the world and the uncertain solidarity of another and, thirdly, a feeling of unequalled power, if not infallibility, that today unites leaders, imperial ideologists and the average American who, only yesterday, had no desire to dabble in adventures abroad. Being at once an innocent victim, misunderstood and threatened, and an irresistible power if it decides to eliminate its adversaries, is the cocktail that, for the moment and perhaps only for a limited time, appears to make Americans so united and so impervious to outside objections, including and

3. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

perhaps above all those of their allies, and those of their liberal intellectuals, who almost seem like émigrés within their own land.

But the unifying formula of war against terrorism conceived as an unbounded, preventive form of defence, harbours as many contradictions as the previous one, which is summed up in the title of the book by David Halberstam on the use of force during the presidencies of Bush Snr and Clinton: *War in a Time of Peace*.⁴ This is illustrated in the views of a virulent critic of the previous phase and even more passionate advocate of the new policy, Charles Krauthammer. This author who, after the demise of the Soviet Union, hailed the 'unipolar moment', has criticised the idea of peacekeeping as unworthy of a superpower (declaring contemptuously, 'We Don't Peacekeep'⁵) and above all military humanitarian interventions, whose demise he announced in a biting and to some extent irrefutable article. Military humanitarian intervention is, he maintains, essentially doomed to failure since, in order for it to succeed, it would have to be prepared to take risks and accept costs on a scale that a state would only accept when its own survival was at stake.⁶ Following the election of George W. Bush, and especially following 11 September, Krauthammer triumphantly announced that at last the new world order was taking shape: that of a bipolar war between the American empire and Islamic terrorism.⁷ And he railed against the few American or European critics who demanded, as with humanitarian interventions of not long ago, an exit strategy for Afghanistan, commenting that the idea was only valid in the case of 'wars of choice', and not 'wars of necessity'. For the latter, there is no exit other than by destruction of the enemy: 'He dies or you die.'⁸

Quite obviously there are as many contradictions in this view, which appears to be shared to a greater or lesser extent by George W. Bush and Ariel Sharon, as in military humanitarian intervention. For instance, does the concept of war apply to the fight against terrorism? Does necessary legitimate self-defence extend to pre-emptive action on the other side of the world? Is war essentially total, boundless, to the exclusion of other forms and other exits than total destruction of the enemy? If there is to be no compromise with terrorists and if no account is to be taken of the causes which they claim to serve, the populations from which they draw support or the rest of the world – allies, rivals or bystanders – will not the result be either an indefinite war against the whole world, ending in the reconstitution of a hostile coalition, or the

4. David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Scribner Book Company, 2001).

5. *The Washington Post*, 18 December 2001.

6. Charles Krauthammer, 'The Short, Unhappy Life of Humanitarian War', *The National Interest*, 57, Fall 1999, pp. 5-9.

7. Charles Krauthammer, 'The Real New World Order. The American Empire and the Islamic Challenge', *The Weekly Standard*, 12 November 2001.

8. Charles Krauthammer, 'The Axis of Petulance', *The Washington Post*, 1 March 2002, and 'They Splutter Through the War', *The Washington Post*, 22 March 2002.

total isolation of the United States, leaving it as a world-wide empire and master of the world waiting for future rebellions, or, conversely, a return to isolationism following one or several economic, social or above all human disasters? The views of British strategic and political analysts who are closest to the United States, like Michael Howard or Shirley Williams,⁹ seem just as devastating on the present strategy as those of Charles Krauthammer were on the previous one.

There will therefore certainly be a third phase after the periods before and following 11 September, but its form is impossible to predict, since it will depend on both external reactions and the internal divisions that these will cause. 11 September was a great shock precisely because it brought into conflict three worlds that were both interconnected and totally alien to each other: that of modern, bourgeois, technological society; that of its adversaries; and that of essentially American traditions – in part pre-modern, Manichean, violent and fundamentalist in their way – reawakened and strengthened by the attacks. There is little prospect of the dialectic between transnational society, national traditions and the logic of confrontation being resolved in the foreseeable future.

The great American paradox, denounced by critics throughout the last century but particularly in recent years, was the gulf between US objectives and the means the United States was prepared to devote to attaining them or the sacrifices it was prepared to make – in other words, the chasm separating its ambitions and imperial status on the one hand and the nature of its political system, society and values on the other. During the Cold War, the nature of the adversary, the existence of nuclear weapons and the clear-sightedness of US leaders combined to reconcile these contradictory demands despite mistakes like McCarthyism or the calamitous failure of Vietnam. As in that case, in the event of a clash between principles or objectives, on the one hand, and reluctance to make sacrifices, on the other, it was the former that gave way – in Lebanon during the presidency of Reagan, in Somalia, Haiti or, in a different manner, Srebrenica or Rwanda under Clinton. Today, the tendency is rather to give primacy to war against terrorism, at the risk of changing the nature of American society and reviving more martial traditions, for instance Theodore Roosevelt's admonition 'Unless we keep the barbarian virtues, gaining the civilized ones will be of little avail',¹⁰ or, more recently, pre-

9. See Michael Howard, 'What's in a Name?', *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2002, and Shirley Williams, 'Please, America, listen to your foreign friends', *International Herald Tribune*, 29 March 2002.

Christian traditions, as in *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands A Pagan Ethos*,¹¹ the latest book by Robert Kaplan, who in an earlier work, *Balkan Ghosts*, is reckoned to have dissuaded Bill Clinton from involvement in the Balkans.

Will America rediscover its spirit of the Far West or that of the Roman Empire by wagering, like Robert Kaplan, that ‘There is no “modern” world’, thus giving the lie to Benjamin Constant, for whom transforming modern individuals into Spartans, as in the French Revolution, or into Roman soldiers as Napoleon did, could only end in tyranny, and, above all, by turning its back on all of its recent tradition of being at the forefront of modernity, capitalism and globalisation? Or are we simply witnessing a ‘post-11 September syndrome’ that is merely concealing or replacing the ‘post-Vietnam syndrome’? That is impossible to predict without prior knowledge of the nature and scale of the next shocks. One can, however, hazard some idea of future developments by going back to the past and considering some possible American reactions. The following chapters will examine traditions and trends in American history, the dilemmas and debates of the period between the end of the Cold War and 11 September and the changes that those events brought about, before returning to the question of the future, and concluding with a discussion of the possible place and role of Europe in this confrontation between the ‘new Rome’ and the ‘new Barbarians’.

10. Cited in David Healy, *U.S. Expansionism: the Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 115.

11. Robert Kaplan, *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands A Pagan Ethos* (New York: Random House, 2001).

American history and contradictions

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1

Traditions and trends

The face that the United States presents to Europeans has always displayed images of both its future and its past. Tocqueville saw in it above all a foretoken of the future of democratic societies, stressing at the same time, however, that, with its growing power and emergence from isolation, the role of the executive power and the bureaucracy would grow along European lines. Hegel, echoing the expression of Napoleon, 'This old Europe bores me', considered in his *Aesthetics* that the epic, which had been replaced by the bourgeois novel in Europe, was no longer a possible literary form except in America, where individual prowess could still be praised. Yet he too thought that economic progress and social differentiation would bring with them both the rational state and the prosaic monotony and primacy of individual privacy that are typical of the modern world. Neither writer would have been surprised to note, in our era, the coexistence of traces of and nostalgia for the old pioneering days, the gospel of competition and the conviction that one is the exception that must serve as a model for the rest of humankind, laying down rules for it yet without submitting to them oneself.

However, viewed from Europe, but also to a large extent according to a traditional American interpretation, one can trace the development of US foreign policy in the opposition of idealism and realism, and that of isolationism and internationalism (or imperialism). The United States seemingly passed from idealism to realism under the influence of theorists who had come from Europe (like Hans Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger), and from isolationism to imperialism (with Theodore Roosevelt) and internationalism (with Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt) in response to the rising power of America itself and its potential rivals. The very duality of the terms imperialism and internationalism indicates that these oppositions are nothing less than clear and obvious. It has long since been shown that American isola-

tionism and internationalism each had both idealist and selfish forms and, equally, that pursuit of the national interest, like that of virtue, could lead the country either to involvement abroad or withdrawal.¹²

Above all, recent studies have shown quite clearly that the puritan conviction that what is good for America is good for the world has never been absent, that true isolationism has never existed, or at least has never been synonymous with passivity when American interests have been involved (between 1801 and 1904 the United States despatched its navy and marines 101 times to Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean and Latin America to prevent or punish attacks on its citizens or property), and that the appropriate terms have rather been *exceptionalism* and *unilateralism*. In order to understand their content, development and relevance to the question of military intervention, one has to distinguish between ends and means, diplomacy and strategy, the evolution of American society and that of the international system.

In an analysis of 'the American encounter with the world since 1776',¹³ the historian Walter McDougall contrasts two views of American exceptionalism, based on eight successive traditions bearing the stamp of unilateralism to greater or lesser degrees. What he terms the 'Old Testament' view is inspired by the idea of America as the promised land: what America *is* and becomes is to be defended at all costs, as a regime founded on liberty, particularly as opposed to the squabbles and ambitions of the Old Continent. He includes in this view exceptionalism and unilateralism but also the doctrine of the American system and continental expansionism in the name of the country's 'manifest destiny'. What he calls the 'New Testament', which takes over after 1898, is based on the idea of the 'crusader state'. This concerns rather what America *does* and the way in which it wishes to change the world: this is the progressivist imperialism of Theodore Roosevelt, Wilsonianism or liberal internationalism, containment and what he calls 'global meliorism' or the desire to do good and cure all of humankind's ills.¹⁴

McDougall considers that the 'Old Testament' is at once more moral and more realist than the 'New', without concealing the hypocrisy that could lie behind the virtuous egoism of the former or the realism that the new American power was seemingly able,

12. Robert Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

13. Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997).

14 *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 10.

during the twentieth century, to bring to the ambitions of the latter. He makes a ferocious criticism of the hubris and dogmatism of Wilsonianism, and a more measured assessment of 'meliorism'.

What seems to emerge most clearly from the comparison of successive policies is that there are two which really combine morality and realism, respect for principles and balance of power: there is that of the Founding Fathers, which combines exceptionalism and the 'American system', and there is containment. The first was summed up well by Daniel Webster, in whose view the proximity and size of an adversary had no effect on principles but had a great bearing on whether those principles were applied prudently or not, and by John Quincy Adams, for whom 'America is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.' (July 4th Address, 1821). The second, containment, is both, and indissolubly, a defence of liberty against totalitarianism and a defence of balance of power against the hegemonic ambitions of any continental rival. The difference between the two is that the first rules out 'entangling alliances' whereas the second accepts for the first time the involvement of the United States in permanent alliances, including the integration of its forces and a physical presence of indeterminate duration in distant lands. One has to note that it is a question of organisations and alliances that are dominated by the United States, that the latter has not at any time failed to reserve for itself an element of unilateralism and freedom of choice, and that the very partial American enthusiasm for multilateral international organisations seems to have been restricted to periods immediately following wars (the League of Nations after the First World War, the UN after the Second and the UN again in the first few years after the end of the Cold War). It has been questionable whenever, within those organisations, their supremacy is or seems likely to be contested, and when the urgency of the threat or external challenge seems to be fading or, on the contrary, increasing, while calling them directly into question, as after 11 September.¹⁵

At such times, the United States is prompted to exercise the privilege it has, like the British but unlike the European continental powers, of being insular, and choosing between involvement or withdrawal, attempting above all to rely on the involvement of the

15. See Stanley Hoffmann, 'The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism', ch. 5, in *World Disorders: Troubled Peace in the Post-Cold War Era* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 70-88.

others while balancing them against each other and engaging its own power, especially its naval forces in one case and air in the other, as much or as little as it wishes. In the words of Francis Bacon, 'he that commands the sea, is at great liberty, and may take as much, and as little, of the war as he will.'¹⁶

This freedom of action that is the preserve of those who are not, unlike the continentals, subject to the requirement to defend their demesne, encourages the idea of replacing war with trade: if American isolationism has reproduced Britain's former 'splendid isolation', both approaches combine the option of political and military withdrawal and the maintenance and encouragement of economic ties, together with a propensity for humanitarian and universalist ideas. On the diplomatic-military level proper, flexibility makes possible greater savings in manpower and money: thus Britain would manoeuvre between the continental powers and, in the days of empire, sent into battle élite troops drawn from indigenous minorities.

There are, however, significant differences between these two traditions from both a moral and political point of view, and at the strategic level. American individualism, mistrust of the state, the tradition of militias during the War of Independence and the frontier spirit explain on the one hand the importance of the use of force by individuals and resistance to gun control and, on the other, the value attached to the life of every American serviceman: the model is still that of individual citizens coming together voluntarily and temporarily to hunt or eliminate criminals. Moreover, if the preferred British tradition is one of indirect strategy based on ruse and manoeuvre, the American custom is rather that of the massive frontal clash during the Second World War the two strategies were continuously at loggerheads.

And it was precisely during the twentieth century that changes in the nature of wars (Korea and Vietnam possibly even more than the two world wars), the possibilities offered by technological progress in the fields of destructive power and transport, and the new predominance of the United States, affected the country's views on the use of force.

Perhaps the original model is that of the American Civil War, where the issues (slavery and the survival of the Union) were quasi-absolute and the strategy employed one of annihilation, where technological advances contributed to warfare's deadly character

16. Quoted in John Keegan, *The First World War* (Vancouver, Wash.: Vintage, 2000), p. 45.

(the number of American military casualties was proportionally higher than in any war of the twentieth century) and where the limitations that had become accepted in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (such as the distinction between combatants and non-combatants) were ignored (as were the rules of chivalry and the Christian tradition's criteria of proportionality and discrimination) in the name of the principle, made famous by General William Sherman, that 'war is hell'. In both world wars one again found what has been termed 'the American way of war',¹⁷ a radical concept that has the character of a crusade and includes the forming of a massive military force and a conduct of operations which, having 'a single goal: victory', set aside any political considerations of the consequences of the war. However, as from 1945 the appearance of nuclear weapons and the prospect of a conflict with the one-time Soviet ally posed a major challenge to this tradition. The policy of containment and the strategy of deterrence implied an essential but negative role for force that was satisfied by the absence of defeat pending economic and social developments that would bring about the consolidation of the West and the decomposition of the Soviet camp.

In the margins of the main confrontation, resort to threats (as in the case of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1946) or subversion (such as the overthrow of Mossadegh in Iran in 1953) contributed in a more active way to maintenance of the status quo.

Yet it was the Korean War that introduced a number of changes (and American frustration), through the idea of the limited use of force not to obtain total victory but simply to preserve a local status quo. Going against an American military philosophy initially expressed by General Omar Bradley ('It is the wrong war at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy') and then by General MacArthur's proposal to take the war to China, even using the atomic bomb ('There is no substitute for victory'), the new circumstances and the authority of President Truman imposed a long, frustrating land campaign that was costly in terms of both casualties and the American economy.

From that time there has been a constantly recurring tension between political and military power, and between the strategy of all or nothing and that of gradualism and limited war. The resulting frustration led to John Foster Dulles's idea of 'rolling back' communism as opposed to containment, and to the strategy of

17. See Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1983).

massive retaliation and the priority given to air-delivered weapons.

Yet US inaction at the time of Dien Bien Phu and the Hungarian revolution demonstrated that policy's lack of credibility, especially in the new state of nuclear parity with the USSR. The many doctrines of limited war and graduated or flexible response date from that time. Advanced in particular by a new school of civilian strategists, mostly with a background in economics, those doctrines sought to combine the military and the political dimensions in the interests of forceful or 'coercive' diplomacy in which military force would serve not so much to destroy the enemy or occupy his territory as to influence his calculations. Technological progress would thus make possible a shrewd strategy of micro-management, resurrecting the principles of proportionality and discrimination. This strategy could be applied directly, and in real time, by the government.

That revolution seemed to have worked remarkably well during the Cuban Missile Crisis: even if this was less of an American triumph than was thought at the time, the outcome was certainly more favourable for the United States than the military intervention advocated by the generals would have been. On the other hand, Vietnam was the Waterloo of coercive diplomacy and political micro-management.¹⁸ President Lyndon B. Johnson wanted to decide himself the targets that would be bombed and carry out a gradual escalation without exceeding what was acceptable to the American public. But the destruction wreaked, while being too slow and progressive to make the Viet Cong submit, ended by being unacceptable from a humanitarian and moral perspective to the American people, who witnessed directly on television the horrors of a war in which many of their sons were fighting.

The inglorious end to that war generated a mutual suspicion among the three elements of the Clausewitzian trinity – government, army and people – that lasted until at least 11 September and has still not completely disappeared. The military criticised the gradualism that was imposed by the politicians, reckoning that if they had 'given it all we've got' from the beginning they would have been able to win the war. Additionally, they considered that they had been betrayed by American society at a time when, militarily, they were near to victory, largely because of the press and television. Whence a reaffirmation of the traditional doctrine of having available overwhelming force before becoming involved,

18. See Pierre Hassner, 'On ne baigne pas avec la force', *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 1971.

and using it at an early stage, abhorrence of intrusion by civilians in the conduct of operations, attempts to control public information and, last and most importantly, an effort to avoid taking the blame for any defeat by demanding the involvement of units (such as the National Guard) outside the armed forces proper in all military interventions and by making the greatest effort to avoid casualties among American servicemen. The primary mission of the armed forces now seemed to be to protect themselves.

The politicians for their part, just as much as the military, endeavoured to avoid taking the responsibility for failure. Even more than the latter, they insisted on the requirement to avoid American losses, fearing a public outcry: witness Reagan's sudden retreat from Lebanon and that of Clinton from Somalia when the first American casualties were sustained, as well as from Haiti in reaction to the hostile crowd on the quayside that awaited the arrival of American soldiers. The irony is that the public opinion so feared by military and politicians seems to be much more complex in both its composition and its judgements than its leaders tend to imagine. A lot depends on the latter's authority and powers of persuasion. But above all, since the end of the Cold War a new factor has appeared. The perceived communist threat produced a forced convergence both of external situations and of American views. The disappearance of the Soviet Union has left the United States facing, on the one hand, a multiplicity of conflicts or anarchic situations requiring intervention by an outside saviour or policeman and, on the other, potential threats to its hegemony. This explains the reappearance within the Bush administration of a debate on the priorities of American action abroad and the methods to be used that lasted throughout the Clinton administration. The new executive is rediscovering in a new guise the question of the relationship between old and new threats, between national interests in the narrow sense (what Arnold Wolfers has called 'possession goals') and national interests in the broad sense ('milieu goals'),¹⁹ and between unilateralism and multilateralism, with a tendency to favour the first of each of these alternatives, harking back to an old tradition, whereas possibly the present international constellation would tend to favour the second.

19. Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), ch. 5.

Dilemmas and priorities

And that is precisely what the debate is about. In a way, the Bush administration arrived at the right time, at the junction of what one might call the 'post-Vietnam' and the 'post-Cold War' periods, revived by what could be termed the 'post-Somalia' and the 'pre-China' situations. Vietnam created a lasting fear of becoming bogged down in a quagmire of needless casualties and the fear, among politicians and the military alike, of taking responsibility for risky ventures. At the same time, the end of the Cold War has made such interventions less risky (as the risks of escalation and generalisation of the conflict have been reduced except in situations directly linked with Russia and China, such as those in Chechnya and Tibet). Interventions also were more tempting, since bipolarity has been replaced by the dangers of anarchy and the hope of a new world order, and by an increase in the number of civil wars and demands to help victims on humanitarian or ethical grounds.

Thus, the efforts made to reconcile prudence and activism by resorting to low-cost, low-risk operations that have consequently had reduced chances of success.

Thus, lastly, growing demands, on the one hand, to give priority to American national interests rather than tasks of world-wide interest and, on the other, for the military to go back to their traditional tasks of deterrence, defence and, possibly, fighting rival powers, rather than become policemen and providers of humanitarian assistance.

Quite naturally, the Bush team has, since the 2000 electoral campaign, appointed itself standard-bearer of this tendency to favour the national rather than the global at the political level, and traditional rather than innovative missions for the military. Yet, in so doing, it has merely accentuated a change in direction already apparent in the Clinton administration after Somalia. That change was hailed by Democrat civilian analysts almost as much as by Republicans, and by the sociological supporters in the Republican Party such as the military and the arms industry – in search of future enemies or challenges such as China, which would make it possible to justify a technological arms race rather than thankless and ambiguous adventures. That is why, in order to analyse American policy on the use of force, particularly in Europe, in the following sections of this paper the three elements

of the Clausewitzian trinity will be examined in reverse order, beginning with the people. Their wishes, and their apparent or expected reactions, have provided both the impetus and the alibi for the policies of governments that have hesitated, as in the case of Clinton, to impose on the military actions and methods against their will. The Bush regime has taken advantage of their drift to the right and tried to meet their expectations, then finding itself on the same wavelength following the events of 11 September.

Public opinion, media, military, politicians

Complex public attitudes

Congress

Everything, as suggested in the last chapter, begins with the people, but who speaks for them and interprets their wishes? One thinks first of course of their elected representatives. Indeed Congress has played an important role, especially since the Republicans' victories in the Congressional elections of 1992 and 1994, in limiting the executive's freedom of action or even acting in its stead.²⁰ Congress has been the originator of numerous economic sanctions against around 50 countries, or has passed laws violating the sovereignty of other countries, often allies, to make their companies conform to embargoes decided by the United States (the Helms-Burton Act, D'Amato, etc.). It certainly contributed to the Clinton administration's change of course, after Somalia, from 'aggressive multilateralism' to a concept of intervention that put the emphasis on the American national interest and freedom of action. And it has constantly eaten into the funds allocated to the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo, even threatening to withhold them altogether, and reacted to the debacle in Somalia by demanding the withdrawal of American forces and opposing their employment under foreign command in future. Yet in the final analysis, and despite the War Powers Act passed after Vietnam, Congress has never blocked military action decided by the executive, even though it approved the Gulf war by only a very narrow margin.

It is on the question of the national interest as *the* criterion and unilateralism as *the* method of pursuing it – together with a refusal to risk American lives, especially in causes that are not of direct concern to America – that the Republican majority, in particular those new members who are ideologically more rigid and more ignorant of the realities of the international system than their predecessors, built its public image, refusing either to ratify the

20. See Ivo Daalder, 'The United States and Military Intervention in Internal Conflicts', in Michael E. Brown (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 476-80: 'An Assertive Congress'.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, sign the Kyoto Protocol on the environment or recognise the International Criminal Court. It is distrustful of the United Nations (as it is of other multilateral organisations not dominated by the United States) and has refused to pay the amount that is owed to the UN and is essential to its functioning.

Just prior to 11 September it might have been asked whether this aggressive unilateralism really was what the American electorate wanted, but also whether the loss of the Republicans' majority in the Congress would change prevailing attitudes. Would a Democrat majority have as much effect on the Republican president as the former Republican Congress had had on the Democrat president? On the first point, it will be seen later that public opinion polls suggest not. On the second, it is difficult to make general predictions. However, for the moment at least, the terrorist attacks have virtually silenced Democrat criticism.

The media

Another factor widely quoted as expressing and forming public opinion as well as determining and limiting American government policy is the media.

What is beyond any doubt is the diminishing amount of space devoted to international affairs in the written press and above all on television. Is this merely a reflection of what the public wants, or are the media on the contrary helping to dictate the public's taste? As ever, both are in part true. The result is that the country with the leading role in the world is also the one in which, as far as the media are concerned, there is the greatest emphasis on local news, a tendency found in all developed countries since the end of the Cold War. According to a poll quoted by Pierre Melandri and Justin Vaïsse, evening television news programmes devoted 45 per cent of their time to foreign affairs in the 1970s but only 13.5 per cent in 1995.²¹

The gap has widened between the general public and the more or less specialist élites who read the three or four national newspapers in which foreign policy still (but again, decreasingly) has an important place. But, as will be seen, even if the public pays little attention to such matters, that does not mean that it is isolationist.²² Governments complain just as much about the public's

21. Pierre Melandri et Justin Vaïsse, *L'Empire du Milieu* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2001), p. 402.

22. Ole Holsti, 'Public Opinion and Foreign Policy', in Robert J. Lieber (ed.), *Eagle Rules? Foreign Policy and American Primacy in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Prentice Hall and Woodrow Wilson Center, 2002).

emotional reactions as they do about its ignorance, again pointing their finger at the media. On top of the normal lack of information there is, in the words of Melandri and Vaisse, a surfeit of information during periods of crisis: this is the famous 'CNN effect', which plays an important part in discussions on humanitarian interventions. Its opponents stress that intervention happens when the television cameras are on the spot to capture images of crimes or famine, as in Somalia, not when they are absent, as was the case in Sudan. Governments justify their half-measures with the following reasoning: 'We would have preferred not to become involved, but the CNN effect, the sight of horrors on television, was producing an irresistible call from the public to do something. However, to be effective, we would have to risk the lives of our servicemen, and the very same CNN effect could act against us. Seeing their sons killed or humiliated, the very same public that today asks us to "do something" would reproach us for having listened to them and would call for an immediate withdrawal.'

Again, there is a certain amount of truth in this argument. Television undoubtedly encourages the tendency in democracies to express feelings of moral outrage or solidarity in reaction to distressing events without being prepared to pay for their cure. And governments are good at exploiting the emotions aroused by televised horrors: the turning points in the West's action in Bosnia and Kosovo were preceded by images of spectacular crimes committed by Serbs that seem to have prompted the decision to launch previously planned operations. Milosevic's big mistake in Kosovo was to expel millions of Albanians whose plight, broadcast on television, was a decisive factor in gaining the support of Western public opinion for NATO intervention.

Yet every detailed study has shown that the 'CNN effect' is largely overestimated. As Warren P. Strobel has suggested,²³ there has been no case of the thrust of American policy being changed by it: there have been interventions that were not preceded by television images and large-scale crimes against humanity (like the genocide in Rwanda) whose widely broadcast horrors did not prevent the Clinton administration from refusing to intervene and blocking moves by the United Nations. In the most frequently quoted cases – Somalia and Kosovo – television cover followed the intervention rather than precipitating it. Above all, the deceptive appeal of the CNN effect is seen in the fact that the American government (and it is not alone in this) has, sincerely or otherwise,

23. Warren P. Strobel, 'The Media and U.S. Policies towards Intervention: a closer look at the CNN effect', in Chester A. Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson with Pamela Aall (eds.), *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict* (Washington, DC.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1999), p. 358.

sheltered behind popular reactions (rejection of withdrawal, refusal to accept American casualties) that have only partly been borne out by the opinion polls.

Public opinion polls

Indeed, if one looks at surveys (especially the frequent, detailed polls organised by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and certain other interdisciplinary teams) that have more accurate and direct contact with the mythical 'will of the people' than the Congress or the media, one is bound to suspect a veritable hijacking of opinion by the governing élites, or at least to question the way they present it and claim to reflect it.

Firstly, one survey that caused a sensation showed that, as a rule, the average American was not isolationist and certainly not unilateralist, that he was largely in favour of the UN and development aid and that he wanted to see the Americans acting in multi-lateral frameworks, including with troops. US participation could amount to 20 per cent in the case of an intervention force – in other words very much higher than at present in the Balkans – even if those polled thought that it was in reality as high as 40 per cent.²⁴

Why is the contrary view of public opinion so frequently accepted? The authors of the above survey put it down to the arrival, after 1994, of aggressively unilateralist and 'sovereignist' young Congressmen who set the tone, and they even talk of 'treason'. But they recognise that this 'treason' is only possible because the moderate views of the majority are not given the same priority nor held with the same intensity by their proponents as is the case for those of the ideologists. The passivity or lack of interest displayed by the majority left the field open to the activism of the latter. Again, it must be said that since the fall of communism it has been the ideological nationalists, whether isolationist or imperialist, who have set the tone.

Another argument that can be used to qualify the significance of the results of Steven Kull and I. M. Destler is that answers given to a poll on a general, hypothetical crisis give little indication of what the reaction of the public would be in a real situation where it was invited to support putting into practice principles that it had previously agreed. This criticism has some validity and explains, without necessarily justifying, the mistrust of govern-

24. Steven Kull and I. M. Destler, *Misreading the Public: The Myth of a New Isolationism* (Washington, DC.: Brookings, 1999).

ments that are convinced of the volatility of public opinion and the fragility of its support for international ventures.

However, that criticism is itself largely invalidated by the fact that, confronted with the situation in Mogadishu, which caused Bill Clinton to hastily withdraw his forces from Somalia to avoid further losses, the first reaction of the American public was that reinforcements should be sent (37 per cent), that reprisals should be made (26 per cent) and that the current strategy should be maintained (10 per cent). In the case of Bosnia, support for American intervention, which of course fluctuated and was never wholehearted (unlike support for the Gulf war, even on the assumption that there could be as many as 5,000 casualties) was 67 per cent on average. For Kosovo, a clear majority were in favour of air intervention and a smaller majority (which never fell below 50 per cent) were for the land operation to which the American government and the Pentagon were so opposed.²⁵ What is more, a study carried out in 1999 comparing the views of the public, civilian leaders and military hierarchy showed that in six scenarios concerning ending ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, the first group would have accepted higher losses than the second.²⁶ It is obvious that the received wisdom on the unacceptability of American casualties needs to be examined much more closely regarding variations from one social category to another and as a function of the objective and nature of the conflict.

These two criteria are obviously not coincident, but there is a remarkable overlap and correlation.

Three, partly contradictory, features characterise the attitudes of the American public: individualism, moralism and exceptionalism. Individualism brings with it a lack of respect for *raison d'état*, above all that of other states, and the idea (which is on the decrease following 11 September) of the superiority of the individual and his rights over the state and its demands. Moralism entails a tendency to Manicheism and portraying adversaries as criminals, but also a preparedness to act in the cause of world peace and democracy. Exceptionalism carries with it a tendency to consider that the United States is empowered, because of the purity of its intentions and the excellence of its regime, to judge between good and evil, to award others good or bad points, to punish the wicked and troublemakers, not to recognise any superior legal authority above that which comes from the American people themselves,

25. See Bruce W. Jentleson, *Coercive Prevention: Normative, Political and Policy Dilemmas* (Washington, DC.: United States Institute of Peace, October 2000), p. 27.

26. Holsti, *op. cit.*, p. 78. See also Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, 'How Many Deaths are Acceptable? A surprising answer', *The Washington Post*, 7 November 1999, commenting on an investigation by the Triangle Institute for Security Studies.

and to consider any external inclination to cast doubt on American intentions or to apply to it the criteria that it applies to others as an insult.

Yet these characteristics which, taken together, tend to paint a classic picture of what Stanley Hoffmann calls the 'Wilsonian' syndrome, or of swings between idealism aimed at saving the world and isolationism aimed at escaping from it, are tempered by political divisions among the public and prudence and common sense that regularly curb extremist tendencies.

The divide between Democrats and Republicans, which re-emerged after the end of the Cold War, is reflected in the views expressed in opinion polls. Democrat voters are more sensitive to grand humanitarian causes, and Republicans to American interests in the narrow sense, or at least to a 'realist' vision based on considerations of power. This explains their traditional criticism that the Democrats rashly involve America in wars that are not imposed by the national interest yet are reluctant to pay the cost of the military effort needed to win them.

Two other divisions, along more or less the same lines, have recently been highlighted. A 'Jacksonian' tradition²⁷ (alongside those normally listed – isolationist Jeffersonianism, idealist Wilsonianism and realist Hamiltonianism) and a Southern tradition opposed to that of New England,²⁸ have been identified. The two cleavages, which have much in common, are to a large extent identified with a considerable portion of the American population who are at once populist, individualist and hawkish, in favour of guns, self-defence, hunting and external military intervention if it is in defence of tangible American interests. They are thus opposed to both isolationism and the idealist or Wilsonian type of pacifism.

It is quite clear that 'Jacksonian' attitudes have recently tended to dominate, even when Democrat administrations, under Carter and Clinton, or even in some respects Republican, as under Reagan, and to some extent George W. Bush,²⁹ have adopted a Wilsonian style. It is true that among intellectuals a certain number of personalities who have traditionally been pacifist, or at least hostile to the use of force, as in Vietnam and Latin America, have become interventionist in opposition to mass crimes, particularly in former Yugoslavia. But these have little resonance among the general public. Without embracing the 'sovereignist', isolationist

27. Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Kopf, 2001), chs. 2 and 6.

28. Michael Lind, 'Civil War by Other Means', *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1999.

29. Max Boot, 'George Bush: the W stands for Woodrow', *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 July 2002.

or imperialist excesses of the Republican right, even before 11 September the American public were more in favour of military intervention or more inclined to accept casualties when it was a question of opposing aggression against the United States and its allies than when it was in order to spread democracy or modernise societies. Their support, moreover, depends largely on the chances that the operation will be a success and the clarity with which its aims are spelt out by the Administration. The public are 'moderately prudent', concerned above all about domestic affairs, but capable of being mobilised, within certain limits, when called upon by the military and political élites which claim somewhat improperly to represent it. It is those élites which must now be examined to understand the paradoxes in American attitudes to the use of force, beginning with those whose business it is yet who are the most resistant to it, namely the military.

The dissatisfied military

The US military's position on the use of force is characterised by an impressive number of contradictions and paradoxes. The most obvious of these have already been referred to: the reluctance of the professionals to employ force and, when it has to be used, their even greater reluctance to risk casualties or accept limitations. These two factors combine to give a preference for air strikes and an unwillingness to engage in ground operations or law and order and peacekeeping tasks. The difficulty lies in reconciling the American military tradition, the possibilities offered by technology and the new risks posed by civil wars, failing states and terrorism. Yet behind these attitudes and reactions to confronting the outside world can be seen another, possibly more fundamental issue: relations between the military and American society in general, and the political and intellectual élites in particular.

The American military tradition is one of all-out engagement or nothing. The question whether a war is just arises regarding its objectives, the *jus ad bellum*, not in respect of the way in which it is to be fought, the *jus in bello*. Decisive and preferably overwhelming force is to be applied as early as possible in order to destroy the enemy without being too discriminating. The tradition, more than being one of waging war as an instrument of policy, and especially as one stage in a sequence that includes peacekeeping and

administering conquered territories, is one of either crusade, elimination of the Indians or civil war, and thus three forms of confrontation in which the adversary's legitimacy and right to be treated according to the same rules are not recognised. Of course, a high value is set on individual lives, but with a clear distinction, in what Walter R. Mead calls the 'Jacksonian' tradition, between those of Americans and others. That tradition has observed a continuity between the domestic and the external, between peacetime and time of war, but only in so far as the army has been seen as a continuation of the citizens' self-defence militias.

Now, however, both the political challenges and the opportunities afforded by technology since the end of the Cold War have called into question those traditions. Waging, in David Halberstam's words, 'war in time of peace' implies a controlled process of escalation that is, even more so than in the sense intended by Clausewitz, 'much too serious a thing to be left to the military'. The Clausewitzian principle that is becoming dominant is not one of war of annihilation but of the use of military means to attain political ends, or even one whereby 'All military art then changes itself into mere prudence, the principal object of which will be to prevent the trembling balance from suddenly turning to our disadvantage, and the half War from changing into a complete one.'³⁰ 'Events proceed', as General Wesley Clark has wisely written apropos of Kosovo, 'from diplomacy backed by discussions of threat, to diplomacy backed by threat, to diplomacy backed by force, and finally to force backed by diplomacy.'³¹ Three constraints arise. The first is domestic public opinion, which is imposed both by the democratic system and by the communications revolution, which allows people to see, direct or in near real time, the horrors of war. Second is the attitude of the population of the adversary or of third parties, which must be influenced favourably or at least not antagonised. And lastly there is the position taken by allies who, in a war waged by a coalition, particularly NATO, have a right to a say in the methods employed (decision on ground intervention, selection of targets, as in Kosovo, etc.).

It is on these last points that what General Clark calls the specific conditions of modern war come into conflict with both pure military logic and the American military tradition.

This dual conflict has been aggravated and made particularly harsh by the Vietnam experience. For Clark, as for Colin Powell, that experience led to a criticism of 'gradualism',³² of the slow,

30. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), Book VIII, ch. 6, p. 401.

31. Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo and the Future of Combat* (Oxford: PublicAffairs Ltd, 2001), p. 461.

gradual escalation imposed by politicians and civilian strategists, and of the President's pretension in micromanaging the war.

This explains, at the strategic level, the determination of the military not to allow interventions to be imposed on them whose objectives, means and exit strategy are not clear, only to intervene where they have overwhelming superiority and the assurance of a short war, to demand maximum autonomy in the conduct of operations, and, at the same time, to involve politicians and society as much as possible so as to avoid taking the blame for any American casualties or defeats.

The other revolution, that of the precision of weaponry, etc. made possible by advances in technology, facilitates discrimination, proportionality and political control, the last of which is not particularly appreciated by the American military. It also, however, gives greater importance to the role of the air force by offering the possibility of acting with greater impunity and achieving a quick victory. Such use of air power could in particular reduce the risk of ground combat, of becoming bogged down in a Vietnam-type quagmire and of 'mission creep' leading to the military taking on unrewarding, dangerous 'civilian' tasks.

Even prior to the war in Kosovo, military or ex-military authors like presidential candidate Bush's adviser John Hillen, justified the abandoning of Afghanistan following the defeat of the Russians in 1989, and reluctance to become involved in minor interventions or in peacekeeping, with the catch-phrase 'superpowers don't do [i.e., clean] windows'.³³ During the Kosovo war and the anti-Taliban operation in Afghanistan, US Air Force officers like General Michael Short complained bitterly at the obligation to avoid civilian casualties, something they considered counter-productive from the point of view of military effectiveness and the protection of American military personnel. During the Kosovo operation General Clark found himself caught in the crossfire, defending the intervention in the Balkans before a military hierarchy who were anxious to plan on the assumption of no more than two major operations (in the Middle East and Asia) at any one time, engaging in a more robust air campaign in the face of objections from America's allies, in particular the French, preparing for a land intervention (or at least not excluding it) in the face of those officers who, like General Short, recommended an all-air campaign, and resisting the politico-military advocates of non-

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-8.

33. John Hillen, 'Superpowers don't do Windows', *Orbis*, vol. 41, no. 2, Spring 1997, pp. 241-58

engagement like Defense Secretary William Cohen and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the politicians who wanted to run the least electoral risks, such as President Clinton and his advisers.

The second set of paradoxes concerns relations between the military and civil society. There was obviously the greatest incompatibility possible between President Clinton (an opponent of the Vietnam war, preoccupied in the first place with the economy and domestic policy, and the incarnation of permissive, individualist America) and the military. Yet this allowed the latter greater autonomy and enabled them to have a greater say in political matters (for instance, General Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, had no hesitation in opposing planned interventions), since Clinton lacked the authority to call them to order.

A similar paradox (or dialectic) appears in the military's overall relations with American society. Firstly, the military are much more highly regarded and popular in the United States than in other countries in the West: witness the number of generals who have become presidents and the political role played by Marshall or Powell. Secondly, they consider themselves (at least prior to 11 September) the poor relations from the point of view of defence expenditure (the level of salaries or the size of the defence budget) and values: respect for authority, patriotism, courage and self-sacrifice seem to them to be qualities that are disappearing in an America that is hedonistic, permissive, relativistic, individualist and self-satisfied. In the years before 11 September, they were increasingly sliding further to the right of the political spectrum than their fellow citizens³⁴ and for the most part subscribed to one of the two cultures described above, that which preaches a return to traditional values. At the same time, in their disinclination to embark on adventures or take risks, or even to venture far afield or put up with discomfort, in the priority they place on force protection, technological solutions and bureaucratisation, they have been coming increasingly closer to the growing trends in civil society. The question debated in the late 1990s was precisely whether the gap was widening between the military, who were attached to the traditional values of their profession that were essential to its effectiveness, and a society that was distancing itself from those values and opting for material comforts (as retired Colonel Ralph Peters has said, 'in the twenty-first century America is likely to be "fat, smart, and happy" while its soldiers police the fringes of its

34. Ole Holsti, 'A Widening Gap Between the U.S. Military and Civilian Society? Some Evidence 1976-1996', *International Security*, Winter 1998/99, vol. 23, n° 3, pp. 5-42.

empire to keep the conflicts that have plagued Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East as far from public concern as possible'),³⁵ or whether, on the contrary, military society was being civilianised.

Here too, 11 September changed everything. During the presidential campaign, George W. Bush had insisted on the need to satisfy the claims of the military, to increase their pay and the overall defence budget, and above all not to give them missions that were not appropriate to their calling, which, he said, was to 'fight and win wars'. His foreign policy adviser Condoleezza Rice, echoing the sentiment of John Hillen, who was one of the authors of a major foreign policy statement by candidate Bush and was to join the administration, went even further by declaring 'We don't need to have the 82nd Airborne [élite paratroop division] escorting kids to kindergarten.' Still, on the one hand, Bush, although the choice of most of the military, was that of only just under half the nation. On the other, while he made an effort to satisfy some of the military's material demands and sided with their common values, he by no means left things to them regarding organisation and strategy. His election marked the return with a vengeance of a species held in contempt by the military: civilian strategists. At their instigation, the Secretary of Defense tried to impose reforms in the fields of flexibility and mobility on the Pentagon that met with stubborn resistance from the hierarchy in all four services. Aided by bureaucratic inertia, this resistance seemed to have gained the upper hand when the bolt from the blue on 11 September arrived to settle everything: there was no longer any need to choose between traditional and innovative projects, because the increase in the defence budget made it possible to adopt the latter without abandoning the former.

But above all, from then on, far from it being a case of military society becoming civilianised, it was civil society that was becoming militarised. The war on terrorism became the be-all and end-all of American foreign policy, and it was conceived in a wholly military way. American flags burgeoned on every house and were worn in buttonholes; America, wounded and threatened in its heartland, launched into the pursuit of its enemies without any of the traditional reservations about the risk of casualties (even if at the beginning of the war in Afghanistan concern for American lives led the United States initially to give the dangerous missions to its

35. Comment to conference audience, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa., April 1998. Quoted in John Hillen, 'Must U.S. military culture reform?', *Orbis*, vol. 43, no. 1, Winter 1999, pp. 43-57.

Afghan allies, which probably enabled Osama bin Laden to escape), or about legal or humanitarian objections. It is on his qualities as a wartime leader that George W. Bush bases his presidential authority and prestige. The themes of warrior virtues to be reawakened and the country's imperial calling are now becoming dominant. The 'spirit of conquest' now reaches out to all states suspected of helping terrorists or making weapons of mass destruction, with unilateral pre-emption replacing deterrence.

Once again, however, the military are not completely satisfied, as they find themselves once more at odds with civilian strategists or ideologists who, more bellicose than the military, want to do battle immediately with terrorist states, beginning with Iraq. Instead the military are calling for prudence and are reluctant to launch into hazardous undertakings.

One has thus gone back to an old duality, except that traditionally it was the State Department that was more interventionist and the Pentagon more prudent. Today it is the civilians in the Pentagon who are keenest on military action and the soldiers, who are more reluctant, have found an ally in the State Department, which is headed by a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Lastly, strategic and institutional reform continue, seeming to give priority on the one hand to technology that leads to a growing automation of military roles (with an inherent risk of errors), and on the other to the direct physical involvement of special forces. The army's traditional units, its tanks, and stealth bombers are in danger and the new formula appears to be a combination of air strikes, information technology and special forces.

Ironically enough, at the same time, the tasks of peacemaking, peacekeeping and interposition that the American military and the Bush administration have resisted almost unanimously seem to be essential in both Afghanistan and the Middle East, assuming an importance such that they cannot be left to allies or supporting forces, which places the responsibility squarely back with the politicians.

Oscillation at the top

As the sign on President Harry S. Truman's desk read, 'the buck stops here'. It is up to governments and, in the case of America, ultimately the President, to decide on the use of force. 'The intelligence of the personified State', in the words of Clausewitz, it is his task to define and defend the national interest. But this national interest has a domestic face, that of society or the people, and an international one, that of the nation or the state. These in turn are divided into, internally, the sum of private interests and the public interest and, externally, the national interest in the narrow sense – what, as mentioned earlier, Arnold Wolfers has called 'possession goals' – and 'milieu goals', the interests of empire, alliance or the international system that the United States claims to lead. The policies of leaders like Clinton or Bush are formed from judgements on private and general interests, domestic and foreign objectives and, among the latter, direct and narrow or indirect and broad interests. Their policy on the use of force is an important aspect of these more general attitudes and priorities that determine the style and content of their presidency.

One can roughly say that the judgements made by Clinton and Bush have been both contradictory and complementary. Clinton's priority was in a sense both domestic and global, while that of Bush is more national and imperial. Clinton put the emphasis more on what Joseph Nye has called 'soft power',³⁶ influence through economic persuasion and cultural seduction, Bush on 'hard power', influence through military or economic constraint. From the point of view of values, Clinton represented what in France would be termed 'cultural liberalism', that of the emancipated generation with its morality of autonomy, tolerance and compassion, while the other represents the reaction of a traditional America that is attached to family and puritan values, order and authority, or is rediscovering them through a fundamentalist type of religious revival and nostalgia for the pioneering days.

The success of the former is often said to be due to a certain feminisation of the electorate, and that of the latter to a cult of rediscovered virility. In terms of the historical traditions identified by historians like Walter R. Mead and Walter A. McDougall, Bush represents the alliance of a Jacksonian base and a Hamiltonian military-industrial complex, whereas in Clinton could be found

36. Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: the Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), and *The Paradox of American Power. Why the world's only super-power can't go it alone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

both Wilsonian and Jeffersonian tendencies, i.e. a greater attachment to equality and the problems of the poorer elements of society domestically, and the spread of democratic ideals abroad.

These comparisons are of course caricatural: faith in capitalism and progress in military technology have been common to both administrations, and Bush and the Republicans have blamed the Democrats for the growth in the executive's powers that Jefferson feared. Above all, in both administrations there have been (and in the case of Bush, continue to be) divisions and spectacular swings in policy. The fact remains, however, that when after a period of hesitation they have had to decide on the basic thrust of foreign policy, especially regarding the use of force, their temperament, ideology and of course the conditions at the time have led them in directions that, while not opposite, have certainly been quite different.

Clinton, whose electoral campaign slogan was 'It's the economy, stupid!', was initially disinterested in international politics (except when it came to external economic policy, in which he was remarkably effective). When, in common with all American presidents, he felt the need, which was especially acute after the end of the Cold War, and therefore of containment, for a foreign policy doctrine (which was formulated by his security adviser Anthony Lake), it consisted in spreading democracy, and therefore prosperity and peace, by encouraging reform in countries of the East and South and their membership of Western organisations. This amounted to joining the trend to globalisation, leading it and pointing it in the direction of multilateralism so far as the Congress allowed it. The interests of the United States as the leading capitalist, democratic power merged with the spread of liberalism and tolerance between races and cultures throughout a world on the American model. This was what Lake called 'pragmatic neo-Wilsonianism',³⁷ which implied the use of economic rather than military weapons. When, however, the latter were called for, Clinton preferred not to resort to them, or at least to reduce the risks, given his own pacifist leanings and his lack of assurance and authority in strategic matters and in dealings with the military. These had in particular led him not to oppose General Powell, who

37. See James Chace, 'War without Risk?', *The New York Review of Books*, 28 March 2002, p. 33.

always advocated prudence, when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but perhaps his preference was due above all to his fear of the population's reaction to casualties.

When, however, Clinton on a number of occasions found himself involved in military interventions, it was for reasons of domestic policy, as in Haiti, or to avoid having to intervene subsequently in less favourable conditions to extract allied forces, as in Bosnia, or again following the counsel of advisers like Secretary of State Madeleine Albright or Richard Holbrooke when he was responsible for dealing with the crisis in former Yugoslavia, both of whom had a more Clausewitzian concept of the use of force as an instrument of policy and had no hesitation in opposing the military, or Defense Secretary William Cohen, on this. However, he was of a like mind with the latter in wanting to avoid the risks associated with ground interventions (hence his disastrous declaration that there was no question of such an intervention in Kosovo, which was intended to reassure domestic opinion but at the same time reassured Slobodan Milosevic). A similar intention lay behind the clumsy symbolic bombing of a chemical plant in Sudan and the attack on one of bin Laden's training camps in Afghanistan with cruise missiles in response to the terrorist attacks in 1995. Above all, his attitude explains the decision not to react to the Srebrenica massacre or the genocide in Rwanda (which it was even forbidden to call by its name for fear that recognition of genocide would make inaction unlawful), on which he was subsequently to express his regret. As for the role of American forces in peacekeeping, this was subjected to restrictions imposed because of the reluctance of the military and the Congress but was not opposed in principle.

Even before the 2000 presidential election, it was possible to discern in George W. Bush attitudes towards several of these issues that were different from his predecessor's. He had admittedly based his campaign even less on foreign policy than had Clinton, and it was known that he was not particularly well versed in international affairs. However, the posture he had chosen to adopt, that of a grass-roots Texan, and the supporters on whom he relied, did not predispose him to humanitarian interventions and multi-lateral institutions. He had little compunction about the use of force within the country, since, as Governor of Texas, he held the record for capital punishment, was in favour of a hard penal policy and was opposed to restrictions on the possession of firearms. However, he gave no sign of any desire for imperial domination

abroad or any taste for military adventures. While for him the military were there to wage and win wars rather than keep the peace, it was hard to see what wars those might be. The increase in the defence budget seemed destined, on the one hand, to improve the quality of life of service personnel and, on the other to pay, for advances in technology, in particular national missile defence. At the geostrategic level, American power seemed above all directed at maintaining supremacy over any possible challenger, in particular China in the event of a conflict over Taiwan.

American strategy post-11 September

War on terrorism

The first year of the Bush presidency, which saw the nomination to key posts of people ideologically opposed to arms control negotiations and the denouncement of a series of international treaties so as to preserve America's freedom of action and immediate interests, was none the less uncertain and hesitant regarding America's priorities for international action. But then came 11 September, which in two hours gave George Bush a foreign policy that can be summed up in three words: war on terrorism. That policy has three advantages: it is as simple and universal as containment of communism; unlike the uncertainties and complexities of the post-Cold War period, it has the almost unanimous support of the American people; and it is in line with George Bush's instincts and the ideas of some of his most influential advisers.

In a way it could be said that the relative ignorance of the outside world shared by George Bush and the majority of Americans meant that they were immediately (and to a large extent still are one year later) on the same frequency: the incomprehensible bolt from the blue of 11 September was bound to herald a radically new era and an uncompromising enemy to be eradicated – radically. The vague feeling of vulnerability yet at the same time of unparalleled power mentioned earlier suddenly took form in the shape of an enemy, symbolised by Osama bin Laden but omnipresent, that had to be and could be eliminated. 'We have found our mission', George Bush declared.

That form of words (like the unfortunate use of the term 'crusade') takes on a religious connotation in the broad sense, which is important for the President himself as a born-again Protestant and for a growing section of his supporters from the Christian right of the political spectrum. Equally, the frontier spirit and the idea of an all-out fight for survival in which adversaries have to be eliminated without paying too much attention to rules or niceties

comes naturally to a Texan by adoption, as it does to Southerners or Jacksonians, whose fortunes were already rising at the end of the 1990s. Lastly, within the Republican political élite the group of neo-conservatives and 'Reagan democrats' have called upon America to assume the mantle of a benevolent empire that reaffirms its authority and rediscovers the warrior virtues of ancient Rome. That group are neither particularly religious nor especially populist but are strongly pro-Israel and distrustful of Arabs and Europeans, and, in particular, are reacting against the widespread relativist, tolerant, liberal, humanist, permissive, individualist, egalitarian and compassionate culture of the Clinton years, and against modernity in general. Several of the most brilliant of that group were advisers who had the ear of the Defense Secretary and the Vice-President, and they understood immediately that 11 September presented a unique opportunity for them to put forward their ideas at the expense of the prudent Secretary of State, with his concern for international collaboration.

George Bush has constantly wavered between these two lines. Contrary to the expectations of those who feared a cowboy-style knee-jerk reaction and those who advocated an immediate attack on Iraq, he opted to give Powell's policy a chance, that is to say a well considered and prepared attack on Afghanistan after a broad coalition had been formed. Yet the at least apparent and temporary victory, which was quicker and more spectacular than expected, vindicated the maximalist camp, producing unprecedented elation and hubris. Now, 'free from guilt and compassion',³⁸ and no longer obliged to take account of frontiers or allies, the United States seemed to have found, in the combination of technological superiority, battle-hardened special forces and local sympathisers, the winning formula that would allow it to impose its order on the world.

In the meantime of course, the complexity of Afghanistan and the Middle East, where for the United States it is impossible either to disengage or impose its will, and the regional resistance and technical difficulties of a military operation to overthrow Saddam Hussein, are tempering the initial triumphalism and providing a reminder of how complex things really are. Through internal but also public debate, and spectacular changes of position, the Bush administration is learning the hard way the complexity of the world and the limitations of power. However, despite divergences and evolution, the consensus in America on policy on terrorism is

38. Robert L. Bartley, 'Conquering Guilt, Forging a New Era?', *The Wall Street Journal*, 11-12 January 2002. See also his 'At Dawn in a New Diplomatic Era', *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 June 2002.

remaining solid and is worth examining precisely because, on the one hand, it is not being seriously questioned within the United States and, on the other, is not shared by the rest of the world, in particular by the Europeans in its priority and intensity.

In some respects, the threat of terrorism has brought the United States and Europeans closer, by persuading them to agree on the necessity of tackling it abroad, including with their own forces, by making the Americans more aware of their vulnerability and the Europeans more supportive, as their recourse to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty showed, and more aware of the world's only global power's inevitable leadership role. At the same time, it has also highlighted even more the disparity between the United States and Europe in military capabilities and determination to act, but also regarding their conception of the common enemy and the way to defeat it.

The following is a summary by Harvey Sicherman, director of the Philadelphia-based Foreign Policy Research Institute, of the concept now dominating American strategy:

w **The enemy is terrorism.** It is his use of terrorism, defined as the deliberate targeting of civilians, and not his ideology or religion, that identifies the enemy.

w **Terrorism is international, not simply transnational.** Terrorists have links with specific states that have aided or employed them. In Bush's words, 'if you harbour or help a terrorist, you are a terrorist.'

w **The front is everywhere.** Not only foreign policy but also domestic policy is concerned, including the question of immigrants, financial controls and civil liberties long taken for granted.

w **All states will be obliged to make a strategic choice.** States antagonistic to the United States or even those on its list of terrorist states will be allowed to switch sides if they renounce their former policies and pay their dues on a sliding scale of contributions to the war effort as specified by Washington.³⁹

There is undoubtedly an element of truth in each of these four

39. Harvey Sicherman, 'Finding a Foreign Policy', *Orbis*, Spring 2002, pp. 219-20.

points that stems from the situation itself and which any government in the shoes of George W. Bush's, and any country in the situation facing the United States, would be obliged to adopt. Yet each one contains ambiguities, difficulties and dangers that are open to varying interpretations and emphasis compared with the concept being followed by the United States today. That explains today's controversy and misunderstanding, and could lead to failures and sudden reversals of fortune tomorrow.

The first point, the war against terrorism as such, contains an unquestionable moral and salutary message: the unconditional condemnation of deliberate attacks against civilian populations, or 'indiscriminate terrorism'. However, difficulties arise when it comes to turning that moral condemnation into political and military strategy. As with communism, but with far less justification, American rhetoric, if not practice, seems to have in mind a war conducted against a centralised enemy that has a single objective, strategy and command structure, or at least against a single 'axis of evil'. Yet, firstly, despite the unsuspected ramifications of al-Qaeda and contacts among terrorists in countries ranging from Ireland to Colombia or Libya to the Basque country, it is often a question of similar acts that are equally reprehensible for the means used but different regarding their origins and aims. Fighting them necessarily means taking this diversity into account, especially if one wishes to stem the flow of recruits and not add to them through inappropriate repressive measures.

Secondly, if the distinguishing criterion is the death or suffering inflicted on the civilian population, it should also be applied to strategic bombing (as in the Second World War, Russia's bombing of Chechnya and the bombing that the US Air Force carried out in Vietnam and would have liked to do in Serbia), and to reprisals against towns and villages, and to most embargoes.

Otherwise, the war on terrorism will be open to four possible interpretations. It may be a Holy Alliance of all states against all uprisings, in which states apply their own definition of terrorism to fit their particular national or ideological adversaries. Or it may be war against global or transnational terrorist movements or local movements, whether nationalist or religious. Or again, it may be an international police action against those guilty of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide, whether state or

non-state entities. Or, finally, it may be war by the United States and those who stand by it against those terrorists (in the first instance Islamic ones) that attack it and its allies, leaving the others aside or even joining forces with them.

Clearly, today American policy and public opinion tend to overlook these distinctions and lump the last two possibilities together, in that the United States and those who are well disposed towards it are considered to be good, whilst those who wish them harm are considered evil.

The second point about the new strategy concerns states. There, too, it is difficult not to acknowledge that there are terrorist states that fund and themselves organise terrorist attacks, or support transnational terrorist organisations, that even when those are apocalyptic or suicidal they sometimes have the financial or logistic backing of certain states, and that it would be impossible to fight terrorism effectively unless one deprived it of the support or sanctuary of those states. The question is how such states are to be identified. The American concepts of 'rogue states' or of an 'axis of evil' include a list, which is variable, of states considered to have placed themselves outside international society and in so doing to have forfeited their right to independence or sovereignty. Yet how are such states to be identified? To the criterion of assisting terrorism is added that of the manufacture, possession of or research on weapons of mass destruction. Yet quite a few respectable states, including the United States, are associated with weapons of mass destruction in one of these ways. The 'ideal' case is that of a state that possesses weapons of mass destruction and supports terrorism, thus putting humankind in the ultimate danger of the use of such weapons by terrorists.

A section of the Bush administration, headed by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, has endeavoured to show that Iraq is precisely such an 'ideal' case, and that not only is it trying to acquire nuclear weapons and has used chemical weapons against its own population (which is beyond any doubt), but that it was a party to the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the mailing of anthrax letters, indeed the inspiration and organiser. That faction's endeavour has for the moment failed, but that has not prevented it from calling for an immediate attack aimed at overthrowing Saddam Hussein on the grounds that, even if he has not so far done so, he could, being an enemy of the United States, in future join forces with terrorist organisations of the al-Qaeda type

and provide them with weapons of mass destruction.

The essential point is that the United States cannot permit itself to run that risk: it must pre-empt and put an end to, or 'change', all regimes that either support terrorism or seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Once they have become democracies, they will no longer be enemies of either the United States, Israel or world peace.

This thus comes back to a sort of 'Wilsonianism in boots' in the sense that Napoleon has been described as '... the Revolution in boots'. This doctrine implies above all a revolution that is strategic as well as political, juridical and moral.

From the strategic point of view, the age of pre-emption could follow on from the age of deterrence. Surprise attack, which the doctrine of the nuclear era maintained one should seek to avoid, could become the rule. That may appear a logical consequence of the appearance of terrorist organisations that cannot be deterred by the threat of retaliation, since, on the one hand, they seek suicide and martyrdom and, on the other, have no territory or infrastructure, possession of which would make them vulnerable. One could also take the view, particularly if instead of attacking the terrorists one were to strike pre-emptively at those states that are likely to support or collaborate with them, that this would open up the possibility of the most unstable situation possible, that of the 'security dilemma', 'the reciprocal fear of surprise attack' and the advantage of striking first.

Juridically, legitimate self-defence would be extended to preventive war, only the sovereignty of peaceful democratic states would be respected, and the dilemmas posed by intervention would be resolved in a radical way that would imply an equally radical revision of the UN Charter. That, in the absence of a world authority, would imply the absolute right of certain states, that is to say basically the United States, to decide on the independence and domestic regime of other states suspected of being rogue states. And that, to put it mildly, would pose moral and political problems.

The third strand of the new strategy is also supported by unquestionable premises. Firstly, 11 September has confirmed the increasingly evident blurring of the distinction between the domestic and the external, army and police, the private and public domains and the centre and periphery; secondly, in the event of grave danger, the privileges and rights of individuals and societies

may be subordinated to the salvation of the community. But tyrannical regimes are distinguished precisely by the way in which they take advantage of exceptional circumstances to make the situation permanent instead of returning to a state of normality and the rule of law once the emergency has ended. Up to now one cannot say that the public or individual freedoms of citizens have been seriously infringed in the name of the fight against terrorism in the United States or other Western democracies. One must, however, note the radical difference between the treatment given to American citizens and that accorded to others. Whether it is a question of their lives risked in combat or their rights, members of the American community are infinitely more precious or sacrosanct than the rest. One may seek to eliminate others simply because they are terrorists, or detain and interrogate them indefinitely without legal representation if they are suspects or foreigners in an irregular situation.

The risk of a change from the concept of a war without casualties, in which the aim is to paralyse the adversary, to one of total war, where one has to destroy in order to avoid being destroyed – from war without risk to war without rules – is potentially high.

The two can of course be combined: the tendency to reduce the risk to the individual by means of technology persists despite the rediscovery of the advantages offered by the use of special forces; ultimately, destruction of the enemy could be even more total and arbitrary if it depended, say, on the automatic reaction of a *Predator* type of remotely piloted vehicle. That stage has not yet been reached. On the contrary, in Afghanistan, concern to spare as far as possible the civilian population has continued to be more important to the US Army (despite certain tendencies of the Air Force mentioned earlier) than to any other army in history. But the notion that rules imply reciprocity, so that they need not be applied when dealing with 'savages' who respect no rules and are therefore to be eliminated, has clearly reappeared.

Lastly, the principle that states must take sides, which is also justified by the fact that, in the face of 'hyperterrorism', political ambiguity and tolerance in the name of its psychological and political motivation are precisely intolerable, nevertheless comes up against formidable moral dangers and political obstacles. The idea that, in the fight against terrorism, countries are recognised as either allies or adversaries, as all are obliged to make a radical choice, could lead to turning a blind eye to the infringement of

human rights or collective oppression if these are justified in the name of the fight against terrorism. The example of Russia in Chechnya is particularly instructive in this regard. But this radical choice is impracticable, and the United States itself will have to come to terms with the ambiguous position of its allies: its relations with moderate Arab states are being affected but have none the less not been broken off.

The crisis in the Middle East, like developments in Afghanistan after the demise of the Taliban and the conflict between India and Pakistan, is necessarily leading the United States to a new awareness of just how complex and ambiguous a business it is to deal with terrorism.

More generally, there will probably be a growing reaction from both the interior (within the population but also within the Bush administration itself) and the exterior (practical realities and the reactions of other countries). Yet, as was stated at the beginning of this paper, no one knows whether that will lead to a state of 'dynamic' equilibrium, to paralysis or to a new cycle of traditional swings in American policy.

Conclusions

The force of empire or the empire of force?

In any event, the tendencies of the Bush presidency that have been described are not simply passing aberrations. They correspond to the conjunction of certain deep-seated and quasi-permanent American traditions (exceptionalism, Manicheism, unilateralism) and certain defining facts of present-day international life: the enormous difference in technological and military power between the United States and all its allies, adversaries or potential rivals, and the radical nature of the terrorist threat. That conjunction could not but lead to both an imperial situation and a temptation to behave imperially that are all the more frustrating for the United States and the others precisely because they are bound to be thwarted.

Never was the phrase 'the impotence of victory' used by Hegel of Napoleon and the conquest of Spain truer. Nor was the classical wisdom, with its warning against hubris and a surfeit of power, such as that of Edmund Burke, ever more relevant: 'I must fairly say, I dread our own power and our own ambition; I dread our being too much dreaded. . . . We may say that we shall not abuse this astonishing and hitherto unheard of power. But every other nation will think we shall abuse it. It is impossible but that, sooner or later, this state of things must produce a combination against us which may end in our ruin.'⁴⁰

The central element that makes these warnings pertinent is the absolute right that the United States currently claims to make sovereign judgements on what is right and what is wrong, particularly in respect of the use of force, and to exempt itself with an absolutely clear conscience from all the rules that it proclaims and applies to others. One illustration of this is that an allegedly criminal head of state like Slobodan Milosevic is being treated as such and Serbia has been obliged by the United States to hand him over to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague or face the cancelling of its financial assistance, whereas the same United States deems it inconceivable for an American to be judged by any international court.

40. Edmund Burke, 'Remarks on the Policies of the Allies with Respect to France', in *Works of Edmund Burke* (Boston, Mass.: Little Brown and Co, 1901), vol. 4, p. 157, quoted in Owen Harries, 'The Anglosphere Illusion', *The National Interest*, Spring 2001, pp. 135-6.

It could be said that the post-Cold War period has been dominated, at an international level, by the opposition between interventionists and 'sovereignists'. In the case of the United States, this dilemma is easily resolved: the Americans are absolutely against any encroachment on their own sovereignty but absolutely in favour of intervention against others (in principle, if not necessarily in practice where, despite the pleas of those who wish to transform them into fierce warriors, they continue to prefer global management to direct engagement). And that by definition betrays an imperial mentality.

Doubtless a return to the imperial theme is in the nature of things. The question, as Roberto Toscano of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has commented,⁴¹ is whether it will be a Hobbesian empire in which the sovereign is above the laws he passes, or a Lockean one where he himself is also bound by them.

Another way of putting the same idea is in terms of asymmetry, a concept that best characterises the current situation for two reasons. Firstly, the present era is one of asymmetric conflict between great technological powers and terrorists or insurgents whose strength lies in their power to disrupt and their capacity for sacrifice. Secondly, at the level of state powers, there is an asymmetry within the international system, as well as within the Atlantic Alliance, between America's power and that of others. Yet, in both cases, the key lies in the combination of inequality (or asymmetry) and reciprocity. In the former, there is a temptation for the Americans, and to a certain extent the other developed countries, to reduce the asymmetry by resorting to the same methods as their adversaries. While legitimate if it means descending from the abstract world of technology into the harsh one of guerrilla warfare and counter-intelligence, such a reaction would be dangerous if it did not also preserve the essential difference between liberal societies and the rest.

Conversely, in the second case, the temptation for the Americans is to maintain, even consolidate, the asymmetry that is a constituent of their imperial power, whereas that power can only be maintained if accompanied by a measure of reciprocity, even if it is partially illusory or contrived,⁴² in its obligations and dealings with others. The Empire can only consolidate if there is some multilateralism, which in turn presupposes, within an inevitable hegemony, a dose of multipolarity.

41. In an article to be published in *Aspenia* (Rome), 19, 2002.

42. Coral Bell, 'American Ascendancy and the Pretense of Concert', *The National Interest*, 57, Fall 1999.

But that of course does not depend only on the United States. It would be expecting a lot to want it to offer reciprocity to allies that are incapable of assuming it or even claiming it. That is where the choices that Europe makes, despite the inevitable asymmetry, can influence America's.

And Europe?

Europe's role must be to act as a steadying influence and to counterbalance or moderate swings in American policy, so as to reduce tension between the United States and the rest of the world. Europe has never believed in the idea of wars without risk, nor must it allow itself to become embroiled in warfare without rules. On the contrary, combining calculated risk and respect for rules is its vocation. In the same way, rather than affirming its own total sovereignty and denying that of others absolutely, Europe must lead the way in the sharing of sovereignty (among willing associates) and respect for it (including respect for that of adversaries when they are open to dissuasion and negotiation). But that presupposes that Europe should have a common position rather than a division between modern states and post-modern societies. It requires Europe not to repudiate the use of force entirely, and that it should be sufficiently capable of exercising it to cooperate with the United States, possibly even to do so without its help. Otherwise, there is a risk that the dialogue between 'the arrogance of power' (W. Fulbright) and 'the arrogance of impotence' (Hedley Bull) could develop into confrontation or even divorce.

Such an outcome would be especially deplorable since, contrary to what Robert Kagan maintains,⁴³ it is not made inevitable either by the power of the United States (which the results show is relative) or by Europe's weakness (which is also relative if one considers its potential). The Bulgarian political analyst Ivan Krastev has said that the Americans feel they are at war while the Europeans are striving to prevent one. In reality, both are at war with al-Qaeda because that organisation is at war with them, but they must endeavour to prevent that war from becoming one of the West against Arabs, Islam or all of the countries of the South. Both the United States and Europe should be aware of that. However, it is a fact that the Europeans tend to underestimate the gravity of the war on terrorism and that the Americans tend to overlook the

43. Robert Kagan, 'Power and Weakness', *Policy Review*, 113, June & July 2002.

danger of it spreading to become a 'clash of civilisations' or a world war.

If, at present, the United States is tempted to overestimate what can be achieved by force, Europe is tempted to undervalue it. Certainly, Europe's prime responsibility, compared with other periods or other regions, is to show the way to societies seeking peace and prosperity, freedom and justice, rather than domination and glory. Yet while the sword is no longer, as Charles de Gaulle thought in his youth, the axis of the world,⁴⁴ neither has the Common Agricultural Policy turned it into a ploughshare. Europe cannot escape the tragic reality that, in order to preserve and promote good, it is necessary to resist evil and sometimes inflict harm.

Unlike the Manicheans or the relativists, Europe has a vocation to understand and convince others that, as Arthur Koestler put it at the time of the Cold War, 'the West is defending a half-truth against a total lie'. Unlike militarists and pacifists, it can and must remain faithful to André Malraux's observation, just after the Second World War: 'It is right that victory should go to those who fought the war without liking it'.

44. Charles de Gaulle, *The Edge of the Sword*, final sentence.

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Has America's attitude towards the use of force changed since 11 September 2001? Is the country being drawn away from the temptations of withdrawal or isolationism towards imperialism, and, moreover, from a liberal imperialism based on economic dynamism to a robust form founded on military power? Is the combined feeling of vulnerability, of being incomprehensibly and unjustly attacked yet at the same time invincible, producing a 'post-11 September syndrome' that is taking the place of the 'post-Vietnam syndrome' yet, like it, may possibly be no more than a phase in an evolution in America that could very well be cyclical?

In an attempt to throw some light on these questions, if not to answer them, this *Chaillot Paper* has endeavoured to take a historical and sociological approach. It begins by retracing the course of American foreign policy and its contradictions, trying to go beyond the classical contrasting of idealism and realism, and of isolationism and internationalism, to consider rather the concepts of exceptionalism and unilateralism. It analyses the contradictions between American military tradition and the efforts by civilian strategists to take advantage of the possibilities offered by technology in order to influence the conduct of military operations in the direction of limitation, flexibility and control. To give an understanding of present-day American attitudes, it analyses in turn the role played by public opinion as it is perceived through the media and opinion polls, and that played by the military and the political élites of successive governments. It transpires that public opinion is in fact less isolationist and reluctant to accept loss of American lives than has been thought, that those who are most unwilling to accept casualties are the military, who are at once more respected and more dissatisfied in America than elsewhere, and that between them and the politicians there has since Vietnam been a mutual mistrust that has sometimes led to inaction.

However, the changes that have followed 11 September are what is most striking. All the divisions mentioned above seem for the moment to have been overcome. America has found a foreign policy that boils down to one mission: war on terrorism. Yet that raises as many problems as it solves when it comes to defining either war or terrorism. Its experience in Afghanistan and the Middle East should serve as a reminder to the United States of just how complex and ambiguous international realities are, and of the limitations of military power. There is certainly a worrying gap between an America that is fired with patriotic, martial fervour and a Europe that is more hesitant and less dynamic yet more aware of the pitfalls and dangers of military adventurism. None the less, dialogue between them, if they agree to listen to each other, could be fruitful.

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