

Inherent Unilateralism: Systemic Unipolarity and US Strategy¹

Kostas Ifantis*

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine l'intention des États-Unis de maintenir une écrasante supériorité globale politique et militaire ainsi que d'entreprendre toute action nécessaire afin de préserver le « nouvel ordre mondial » et prévenir l'émergence d'une puissance rivale. Comme les États-Unis ont encore la plus importante et la plus vigoureuse économie, leur statut de superpuissance n'est donc pas confiné à la seule dimension militaire. Dans un avenir rapproché, aucun autre pays ou conglomérat ne peut espérer défier la prééminence américaine. En même temps, cependant, comme cela a été démontré par les attaques du 11 Septembre, les États-Unis sont structurellement vulnérables et le coût de leur engagement global est plus élevé que ce que beaucoup d'Américains pensaient jusque là.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the American intention to maintain overwhelming global political and military superiority, and take whatever action is needed to preserve the 'new world order' and prevent the emergence of a rival power. Superpower status is by no means confined to the military dimension, as the US still has the largest and most vibrant single national economy. In the near future, no other country or combination of countries can hope to challenge American prominence. At the same time, however, as the 9/11 attacks demonstrated, the US is structurally vulnerable and the cost of its global engagement greater than many Americans thought.

Introduction

One of the very few basic facts of life in international politics is the prevalence of crises plaguing the world. Since the emergence of the state, international politics has always been dangerously competitive and ruthlessly conflictual. War and conflict should be regarded as inevitable features of international politics; security competition, 'hard-wired' in the international system. States make decisions for war or peace on the basis of changes in the

* University of Athens

distribution of capabilities in the international system. As a result, war is always possible in the anarchical international system, because no sovereign power exists to prevent states from going to war. In the absence of world governmental agents, and in a climate of uncertainty, the international political process is shaped in a strictly competitive way. International politics is fundamentally competitive, taking place in a self-help realm. States start wars when the benefits of going to war are high and the costs and risks of doing so are low. The cost-benefit analysis depends on the distribution of power in the international system, as well as the nature of the available military power and whether it tends to favour offense over defence.

Since the Soviet Union's disappearance, international politics has been marked by one very basic fact: a gross imbalance of power in the international system. Not since Rome has one country so nearly dominated its world. US superiority is phenomenal, and its impact on the world fundamental. Today, as never before, what matters most in international politics is how (even whether) Washington acts on any given issue. Great powers are the dominant actors in international politics, extending their influence well beyond their borders, seeking to craft a global environment conducive to their security and interests. Great powers strive to gain power over their rivals and hopefully become hegemons. Once a state achieves that exalted position, it becomes a status quo power.² American predominance is the central feature of the current geopolitical setting. Systemic unipolarity does not make for a particularly egalitarian world, as 9/11 reminded us quite violently. Nevertheless, it is the superstructure and determines the main forces that shape the international system.

Power

The US is the only state with the capacity to try to exercise global political leadership, at least in the short term. It is unquestionably the militarily most powerful country in the contemporary system.³ Let us not fool ourselves, though. Military power remains the existential, hence absolute, currency of power. At almost \$400 billion, the 2003 American defense budget was larger than the defense budgets of the ten next biggest defense spenders worldwide.

Today, the US spends close to forty per cent of the total world defense expenditure while the \$48 billion increase sought by the Pentagon for the 2003 defense budget allocation is some \$14 billion more than that of the United Kingdom's budget, the world's third largest defense spender. In the fiscal year 2003, the US spent 3.5 per cent of its GDP on defense, whereas Britain spent 2.6 per cent, France 2.4 per cent and Germany 1.5 per cent.⁴ The US is currently consuming the equivalent of the UK's annual defence budget every 35 days and that of France every 23 days.

The US possesses the most capable and mobile forces in the world, especially in critical areas such as airlift and sealift vehicles, which can carry forces to trouble spots around the globe. This ability to project power to different points around the globe simultaneously and largely unilaterally appears to rewrite the rules. The "War on terrorism" has accelerated the transformation of the US military into a "post-industrial" force. It is one that is lighter, faster, and more lethal. Such forces strive for battlespace omnipotence by using sophisticated and inter-linked communications, surveillance and targeting systems and the weapons to exploit them. In every sense, unilateralism is inherent in US military strength.

Furthermore, US superpower status is by no means confined to the military. The US still has the largest and most vibrant single national economy. The combination of the two, in turn, drives the political and military strategy of "engagement and enlargement", the lynchpin of US foreign and national security policy. No other country or combination of countries can hope to challenge it within a generation. The 1991 Gulf war, the 1995 and 1999 Balkan campaigns as well as the 2001 Afghanistan intervention and the Spring 2003 war against Iraq have been impressive US exhibitions of "capacity" to go to war and have demonstrated that military power is not obsolete. Although, there can be no absolute US dominance, order can be premised on the total primacy of the US in areas like the wider Middle East, where military power has always served as a major arbiter of events with implications far beyond the region.

At the same time, however, 9/11 demonstrated that the cost of US global engagement was larger than many Americans thought. Despite its overwhelming military superiority and robust economic strength, the US

turned out to be structurally vulnerable, and the primary victim of the collateral expressions of the US sponsored process of globalization. In the aftermath of 9/11 and subsequent US interventions, the United States will have to pay increasingly high costs to keep the danger at a tolerable level. The United States can no longer assume that it can wield global influence at little or no cost to itself.⁵

Echoes of the Cold War

For President George W. Bush, Clinton's foreign policy lacked coherence, clear priorities and a sense of what was important to US interests and security. From the outset, the Bush administration clearly indicated its intention to pursue unilateral strategies. This approach has been identified by many as the unifying theme throughout most of its foreign policy initiatives. Indeed, the most profound effect of 9/11 has been the re-ordering of America's international engagement coupled with the reinforcement of the administration's strident unilateralism. America's attempt to make its own international rules is the most vivid example of unilateralism. The dominant world image post-Afghanistan and post-Iraq, is that Washington can now wage war confident of quick victory, low casualties, and little domestic fallout. And because power drives intentions, US ambitions have expanded accordingly. As Kenneth Waltz has observed, "new challenges have not changed old habits (...). Fighting terrorists provided a cover that has enabled the Bush administration to do what it wanted to do anyway."⁶ America's September 2002 strategic doctrine contained innovations that were bound to create a rift between the US and its allies. The adoption of "pre-emption" meant that the emphasis that had since 1947 been put on deterrence as a central element of grand strategy had thus dramatically shifted.⁷

In the Middle East, US strategy and policy are largely based on three key premises: first, the need for access to reasonably priced oil; second the need to ensure that no hostile power controls the region and its oil supplies or so intimidates other states so as to coerce supplier states into taking actions inimical to consuming nations; and third a commitment to use force if

necessary to protect and further US interests. Especially, in the case of the Iraq crisis, there are at least four sets of assumptions behind the Bush administration strategy.⁸ First, 9/11 has meant that the regional *status quo* has become unacceptable. It was not lost on many in the US that the majority of the terrorists came from Saudi Arabia, a US strategic ally, where the combination of a brutal, tyrannical regime and US support for it (and for Israel) led to alienation, resentment and hatred for the US, and the West in general. Second, for the Bush team, Iraq's development of WMD poses an unacceptable threat that would make long-term peace and stability in the region impossible. Most critical here was Saddam's pursuit of nuclear weapons, which Washington believed he would have eventually gotten if he had remained in power. Third, a strong bias against the Palestinians and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process as this was sponsored by the Clinton administration. The Bush team strongly believes that a settlement would only be possible if and when the Palestinians have a leadership in place that is both willing and able to fight terrorism and to make the difficult compromises inherent in any conceivable 'land for peace' deal. Fourth, most in the Bush administration believe that in the long run, peace and stability will not be possible until the region's régimes become more democratic.

The result of the US decision to intervene militarily in Asia has been to enhance American power and extend its military presence in the world. The war on terrorists has enabled the US to establish bases on Russia's southern border and to further its encirclement of China as well as Russia. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld did announce that to prosecute the war against terrorism, the US will move militarily into 15 more states, if necessary.⁹ The basic fact of post-9/11 international politics is that America's relations with the rest of the world are undergoing fundamental changes. The US is so powerful that those changes are affecting the international system much more drastically than the terrorist attacks themselves.

According to Nicole Gnesotto, urgency, militarization and unrestrained unilateralism do characterize the US response to the strategic challenge of international terrorism.¹⁰ The urgency refers to the fact that the disruption of US strategic priorities was immediate and violent. As a result, the war against terrorism has become the highest priority. All other issues have thus

been relegated to secondary importance. The militarization of US response to terrorism is marked by the defense expenditure figures cited above. These figures disclose the US obsession with military technology and power. This obsession seems like forming the American reaction to terrorist threats, “so much so that this military choice sometimes appears to be its sole policy. The speeding-up of missile-defense programmes takes the place of diplomacy in the fight against nuclear proliferation; the basis for building alliances or coalitions becomes the number of divisions and other military assets that allies might be able to contribute.”¹¹

Intoxication with power has resulted in an enthusiastically embraced unilateralism which is quickly becoming guiding principle in Washington. In addition to the sense of heightened danger, the plausibility of the unilateral option has led to a growing emphasis on pre-emption as the main tool in US strategy. It is the replacement of the prudent policies of containment with an embrace of preventive war. This has been the most striking development and the most disturbing for America’s allies. Washington seems to be unprepared to compromise either means or objectives to achieve its strategic imperative goals. In February 2002, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, declared that from now on it would be “the mission that determines the coalition; the coalition must not determine the mission.”¹² What this meant was that institutions — even alliances — that did not fully share the US perception and worldview would be sidelined and replaced with “coalitions of the willing”: “*ad hoc* groupings, case by case, for which these institutions would serve as a kind of pond from which the US could pick out those fish that could be, so to speak, drafted for the coalition.”¹³

The concept of ‘coalitions of the willing’ seems to be replacing historical alliances at the core of the US global strategy. As Nicole Gnesotto has put it, “this cult of unilateralism spills over from the political sphere into that of military strategy”, thus affecting America’s discourse and attitudes regarding its allies. Such views reveal the current flap over unilateral versus multilateral approaches to statecraft. It is a flap that cuts to the heart of the differing worldviews between the US and Europe. Worries about American unilateralist — and military — solutions to regional problems have caused

frustration in many European capitals, while European reaction to the Iraq war has resulted in consternation in Washington. On the political level, the “either you’re with us or against us” Bush doctrine has made the debate among allies with less than identical security priorities extremely difficult. This reach for bipolarity clearly echoes the early days of the Cold War.

Above all, the Bush administration’s approach to the world is state-centric in the most traditional sense. It is formed by a concern with traditional conceptions of security – great powers, rogue states, proliferation of WMD. However big and powerful the US may be, states and state assets are needed to operate; hence the focus on rogue régimes and the drive to change régimes in the wider Middle East.¹⁴

However, the wisdom of granting the trappings of sovereignty to non-state actors such as terrorist groups by declaring that the military will wage open-ended hostilities, remain suspect. Apart from the difficulties of a liberal democracy successfully managing what seems to be a perpetual war, the Bush doctrine has yet to define the conditions for “victory”. Moreover, it risks damaging the fabric of international law with its preemptive strategies and by placing different global challenges into the same category of treatment.

What we have been experiencing is a US aggressive global strategic advance with a very strong element of continuity: a global foreign policy inspired by unilateral *realpolitik* efforts to prevent other states from “renationalizing” their foreign and security policies, thus challenging US primacy. Such a policy of “renationalization” would destroy the reassurance and stability upon which American interests are presumed to rest. Global activism, the centrality of military power and its application, and a strong US-dominated NATO in the framework of European security and stability seem to be the fundamentals of the US post-9/11 foreign and security policy.

A precarious new world balance is emerging. The United States is preoccupied with military power, political leadership and domination of world financial markets. It had all three even before September 11, but the political class and the public were divided on whether such assets should be exploited to make the US into an informal imperial or globally hegemonic power, with all the ostensible rewards, but also the grief which history

provides to those with such ambitions. September 11 made the choice. At least the US administration believes that it did.¹⁵

Balancing

Although America's unilateral power and use of military force is an existential fact and as such requires no justification here, preemption is optional and difficult to justify. The Bush administration has chosen to use America's massive power for preemption in Iraq. In reality it was an attempt to preserve hegemony by using military power. As a result, US foreign policy moved away from its generally high-minded, but nevertheless interest-based roots to espouse a form of global, imperial social engineering. According to Dimitri Simes, two illusions facilitated this process: first, that international crusading can come cheap, and second, that those opposing the US are motivated by a blanket hatred for American freedom and power, rather than by self-interested disagreements with US hegemonic strategies.¹⁶

Imperial powers cannot escape the laws of history. One of the most salient of them is that empires generate opposition to their rule, ranging from strategic realignment among states to terrorism within them. Another is that imperial power and conduct have never been cost free and that the level of opposition to them depends on the costs that the empire is willing to shoulder. The American aspiration to freeze historical development by working to keep the world unipolar is doomed. As Charles Kupchan indicates "unipolarity is here, but it will not last."¹⁷ No dominant country has ever been able to sustain primacy indefinitely. Except for the unlikely event wherein one state achieves clear-cut nuclear superiority, it is virtually impossible for any state to achieve global hegemony. The principal impediment to world domination is the difficulty of projecting and sustaining power across the world's oceans onto the territory of a rival great power.¹⁸ Furthermore, within the context of a world economy, the United States cannot obtain the outcomes it wants on trade, or financial regulation without the agreement of the European Union, Japan and others. On transnational issues, power is broadly distributed and chaotically organized among state and non-state actors.¹⁹

The Bush administration promotes a military agenda that aims self-confidently to master the 'contested zones'²⁰ because it believes that primacy depends only on vast, omni capable military power. It also believes that the US need not tolerate plausible threats to its safety from outside the American territory. These threats are to be eliminated. Insofar as pre-emptive war is perceived negatively abroad, this strategy requires a unilateral global offensive military capability. The effort to achieve such a capability will further alienate America's traditional allies, it will definitely produce balancing tendencies, it will drive the costs of sustaining US military preeminence at unacceptable levels, and it will thus create great difficulties in sustaining, improving, and expanding the global base structure the US has achieved.²¹

Inevitably, a unilateral strategy of preponderance will fail. Such a strategy does not and will not prevent the emergence of new great powers. Immense power and hegemonic strategies allow others to free-ride militarily and economically. Hegemony of the US kind facilitates the diffusion of wealth and technology to potential rivals. As a consequence, differential growth rates trigger shifts in relative economic power that ultimately result in the emergence of new great powers. Eventually, the task will exceed America's economic, military, demographic, and political resources. While contemporary US warfare may be cheap in American lives, it is certainly not cheap in American money. An admittedly crude guess is that the broadly defined military budget, encompassing homeland security, foreign aid and other nation-building programmes, could more than double from 3.5 per cent of GDP in 2002 to as much as 8 per cent over the coming years.²² This would mean that, after the honeymoon of the 1990s, the US people would have to pay back the cold war peace dividend. An open-ended commitment to eliminating threats to the US would simultaneously reduce private sector growth while incurring new government costs. At home, the domestic economy would once again have to fight for resources. Highly skilled labour would be particularly in demand. The US army has become more capital-intensive, as Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) has gradually replaced massed ranks of infantry and requires more reliance on high quality human resource.

Meanwhile, the cost of a single-handed commitment to global security would be high, not to say open-ended. It is true that the American economy, now much larger than during the Cold War, can shoulder the necessary military burdens. If, however, we take the Iraqi crisis as a guide, Washington may find other factors offsetting superior economic fire power. In a unipolar world, the US's potential *ad hoc* coalition partners for each engagement would be in a powerful bargaining position, as the haggling with Turkey during the Iraqi crisis shows. In a world where alignment bonds are loose — and no one is more responsible than the US — the cost to the US of building a coalition increases.

With the US national debt at \$7,015 trillion in February 2004,²³ should the US economy suffer a really steep downturn, the uniquely American combination of tax cuts and massive military spending would be unsustainable. The Bush administration has simultaneously been arguing that it cannot say what the Iraqi war and reconstruction will cost, but that whatever the cost is, it can afford it and \$1,500 billion in tax cuts over the next decade. If, as many estimate, military and security spending take up another 2 or 3 percentage points of GDP, taxes will have to be raised sharply, domestic spending cut to politically unimaginable levels or the fiscal deficit allowed to widen to a point at which even the Bush administration will balk.²⁴ Whatever their thirst for security, it is unclear if the American public and Congress are truly prepared to accept an imperial role on a sustained basis, especially as we are moving away from 9/11. One of the notable things about imperial conduct is how responsive societies are to the rising costs of imperial ambitions. Once the potential cost becomes apparent, the willingness of the American people to pay for their country's imperial strategy will be tested.

Over time the effect of hegemonic pursuit is to erode the hegemon's power base and accelerate its relative decline. The very effort to maintain a hegemonic position is the surest way to undermine it. The effort to maintain dominance stimulates others to balancing counter-efforts. The balancing imperative will become more visible in the not very distant future.

In addition, such a strategy will not work because it requires the actual application of US power almost continuously. As Christopher Layne

indicates, “the leverage strategy is the hegemonic stability theory’s dark side. It calls for the United States to use its military power to compel other states to give in on issue areas where America has less power.”²⁵ It is a coercive strategy that attempts to take advantage of the asymmetries in great power capabilities that favor the US. The strong unilateral US tendencies post-9/11 have resulted in stronger reactions. Americans have always been anxious to believe that there is a new kind of empire and uniquely beneficial. Well before 9/11 Samuel Huntington argued that “a world without US primacy will be a world with more violence and disorder and less democracy and economic growth than a world where the United States continues to have more influence than any other country in shaping global affairs.”²⁶ As a result of this belief in American exceptionalism and singular benignity, the US foreign policy and security establishment is not very good at drawing lessons from historical experience. Moreover, Washington needs to remember that others will have different perceptions. Other states react to the threat of hegemony and unchecked power, not the hegemon’s identity. For example, the US should be more aware that whatever policies pursued in the Middle East, it is almost always perceived as a domineering, imperial power.

The international order objectives embedded in a strategy of preponderance reinforce others’ mistrust of American preeminence. The more the US attempts to press its preferences on others and project its interests, the more likely it is that they will resist and react against overweening US power. Potential rivals include the EU, Russia, China etc. Early indications can be identified. The EU, except in the military field, has a collective weight on matters of trade and finance comparable to that of the US. Its internal development and its attempt to craft a more coherent strategy on security and defence mean that it is slowly and painfully arriving on the global stage. Regarding Russia, it is quite possible that western analysts tend to underestimate its power potential. Russia continues to possess the largest army in Europe (even if its performance is questionable), has a still oversized defence industrial base, an energy industry rapidly modernized, and an economy rich in human capital. In Asia, where the dominance of the US has been unrivaled for more than 50 years, it is now subtly but unmistakably being chipped away as Asian countries look toward China as the increasingly vital regional power. The US military presence

cannot change this fact. Although China's expected, rapid rise to economic dominance is based on questionable assumptions regarding the current size of its economy and, even more problematic China's churning economic engine, coupled with trade deals and friendly diplomacy, have transformed it from a country to be feared to a nation that beckons. Asian countries see China's growth as providing them with more opportunities. This new, more benign view of China has emerged in 2002 and 2003 as the Bush Administration has been increasingly perceived in Asia as having pressed the US campaign on terror to the exclusion of almost everything else. The United States would remain the most significant power in the region, but the inevitably competitive relationship between Washington and Beijing would have more far-reaching consequences for the region. Although, on the diplomatic front, China and the United States are enjoying a friendly phase, this cordiality helps other Asian countries deepen their contacts with China without having to choose between Washington and Beijing.²⁷

The war in Iraq has been a crisis for the United States because UN members saw the prospect of an unchecked American power being tested. Indeed, what they have seen is a USA that insists on its way 'or the highway'. For many around the world, this war is viewed as a step towards seizing global energy control, or hegemonic world economic and trade domination, or to assure Israel's expansion.²⁸ They have seen the US as unable to provide a rationale for its Iraq policy that can convince the majority of democracies, its natural supporters. They have seen it intemperately denounce those who criticize it, and threaten serious and damaging material retaliation against the democracies that actively oppose it on the Iraq issue like France and Germany. In short, they have seen Washington demanding submission and taking steps to obtain it through force. To the rest of the world, this is not very reassuring, to put it mildly. Unchecked American global power seems to be precipitously losing its appeal.

The US cannot prevent a new balance of power from forming, but can delay its coming. Irrespective of whether the intent is benign or not, the war in Iraq has shown that the US has behaved and in ways that most of the time disturb and frighten others.²⁹ Until its power is brought into balance, it will likely continue to do so. Up to now, one of the reasons there has been so

little real opposition to US hegemony in most of the world is that this hegemony has been distant and indirect. The Bush administration seems to be inexorably drawn into the business of direct imperial rule.³⁰ America, the unilateral imperialist, is far less attractive than America, the leader of a coalition enforcing UN resolutions and preventing the organization from following the path of the ill-fated League of Nations.³¹

The more hawkish wing in the Bush administration remains convinced that Iraq will serve as a cautionary example of what can happen to other states that refuse to abandon their programs to build WMD. Public statements of a domino effect could further inflame Arab governments and fuel Iran's and North Korea's considerable insecurities. The war's lesson will be just the opposite, in other words: the best way to avoid American military action is to build a fearsome arsenal quickly, acquire a powerful physical deterrent, thus making the cost of conflict too high for Washington. Many states know that WMD are the only means by which they can hope to deter the US. Washington's policies seem to stimulate the vertical proliferation of WMD and promote their spreading. The North Korean 'dilemma' has already proven that it is too late for preemption — as it is for nonproliferation.

Conclusion

The 9/11 terrorist attacks truly broke new ground. The scale of these attacks, the destruction they caused, the relative ease with which they were organized and executed against the most powerful country in the world, made it very clear that no country would be immune; no country could anymore afford to be complacent about terrorism. Like drug traffickers, nuclear smugglers, and international crime cartels, terrorist groups take advantage of the infrastructure that open societies, open economies, and open technologies afford. Terrorist groups are more able to move people, money, and goods across international borders thanks to democratization, economic liberalization, and technological advancements. They rely on international telecommunications links to publicize their acts and political demands. While propaganda is nothing new, tools like CNN and the

Internet dramatically extend the scope of a terrorist's reach. Terrorists also take advantage of weaker or developing states to serve as base of operation for training and carrying out attacks against Western targets. As the September 11 attacks indicate, counter-state and counter-society abilities have already become more available to radical and fundamentalist groups. Overall these trends suggest that seemingly invulnerable states, however powerful and wealthy they may be, have innate weaknesses.

All these actors, probably as much as weapons of mass destruction proliferation (nuclear, chemical and biological) and their means of delivery, and human-rights abuses, pose profound challenges to efforts to build a new global order as they are more than capable of contributing to violence and other forms of coercion. Contrary to other global challenges (the communications revolution, water shortages, access to energy resources, financial flows) they call directly into question the very authority of the state, and are therefore potentially, if not openly, subversive. This multifaceted conception of security entails a multifaceted approach to security. The latter does not mean a non state-centered analysis. Rather, it means that while a state-centered analysis is capable of illuminating most facets of discord and conflict in the 1990s (for example, proxy wars and irredentism), it should acquire a multidimensional optic, beyond exclusive accounts of military power distribution.³² This multifaceted/multidimensional security concept means that there is no rigid link between a comprehensive concept for understanding a new situation and the quality of the response. On the contrary, a broad concept – where military force and defense policy continue to occupy a central place - allows a flexible, tailored policy in which force is a major but only one of the various means employed.³³ In the final analysis, security is a politically defined concept. It is open to debate whether the widening of security might be a good or a bad political choice, but security is not intrinsically a self-contained concept, nor can it be related to military affairs only. If political priorities change, the nature and the means of security will inevitably follow and adapt to the different areas of political action.³⁴

In an age of protean threats, transnational in nature, transsovereign in quality and coupled with insidious weapons of enormous destructive

capability, the only way forward is through co-operation, preparedness, vigilance and creative diplomacy. The tools to make a safer world already exist: political fora, international law, economic levers, intelligence assets, and where necessary, military power. What remains to be harnessed is a collective will to succeed, a will grounded in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Law. Rather than proving the unilateralists point, the “successes” in Afghanistan and Iraq illustrate the continuing need for cooperation. US aggressive and militarized unilateralism seriously endangers the UN system. It is a claim to the sovereign right to intervene in, disarm, and carry out “regime change” in other countries, subject to no external restraint. As Kenneth Waltz has observed,

although democracies seldom fight democracies, they do fight at least their share of wars against others. Democracies promote war because they at times decide that the way to preserve peace is to defeat nondemocratic states and make them democratic (...) As R.H. Tawney said: ‘Either war is a crusade, or it is a crime.’ Crusades are frightening because crusaders go to war for what they believe to be good causes, which they define for themselves and try to impose on others. One might have hoped that Americans would have learned that they are not very good at causing democracy abroad. But, alas, if the world can be made safe for democracy only by making it democratic, then all means are permitted and to use them becomes a duty (...) That peace may prevail among democratic states is a comforting thought. The obverse of the proposition – that democracy may promote war against undemocratic regimes – is disturbing.³⁵

In its Fall 2002 national strategy statement the US stated its intention to maintain overwhelming global military superiority and take whatever action is necessary to prevent the emergence of a rival. The logic in this is open to negative or positive appreciations. The fact is that the world will remain a very dangerous place. So long as the United States retains a monopoly of muscle, some degree of unilateralism seems inevitable. But muscularity for its own sake will make it more dangerous. In terms of cost, the ability of the United States to remain engaged at an acceptable level will depend in large

part on whether it can reduce the cost by making its preeminent position more acceptable to others. Turning to the real issues that produce the real threat(s) and choosing more carefully the necessary tools may help.

NOTES

1. This article draws in part on Kostas Ifantis, "International Security Today: Understanding Change and Debating Strategy", in Kostas Ifantis (ed.), *International Security Today: Post-9/11 Threats and Regional Challenges*, a Special Issue of *The Review of International Affairs* (London: Frank Cass, forthcoming 2004).
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9. Waltz, "The Continuity of International Politics", op. cit. p.350.
10. Nicole Gnesotto, "Reacting to America", *Survival*, Vol.44, No.4 (Winter 2002-03), p.99.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, p.100.

13. Stanley Hoffmann, "US-European Relations: past and future", *International Affairs*, Vol.79, No.5 (2003), p.1033.

14. See David Hastings Dunn, "Myths, motivations and 'misunderestimations': the Bush administration and Iraq", *International Affairs*, Vol.79, No.2 (2003), pp.282-83.

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16. See Dimitri K. Simes, "America's Imperial Dilemma", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.82, No.6 (2003), p.95.

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18. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p.41.

19. Joseph S. Nye, "US Power and Strategy After Iraq", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.82, No.4 (2003), p.65.

20. Posen, "Command of the Commons", op. cit. p.45.

21. *Ibid.*

22. see Alan Beattie, "A muscular foreign policy may be too costly for Americans to bear", *Financial Times*, 15 March 2003.

23. *International Herald Tribune*, February 19, 2004.

24. *Ibid.*

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30. On the dilemma of sustaining an American empire see Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).
31. Joseph S. Nye, "Bombs can't do it all", *International Herald Tribune*, February 14, 2003.
32. The best example is John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War", *International Security*, Vol.15, No.1, (1990), pp.5-56. He argues that the demise of the Cold War order is likely to increase the chances that war and major crises will occur in Europe: 'The next decades in a Europe without superpowers would probably not be as violent as the first 45 years of this century, but would probably be substantially more prone to violence than the past 45 years. This pessimistic conclusion rests on the argument that the distribution and character of military power are the root causes of war and peace' (p.6).
33. According to Politi, 'only in short-term lobbying battles is an alternative between prevention and repression seen'. See Alessandro Politi, *European Security: The New Transnational Risks*, Chaillot Papers, No.29 (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 1997), p.13.
34. *Ibid*, p.14.
35. Waltz, "Structural Realism After the Cold War", pp.11-12.