

# The New American Century?

Peter Gowan

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*'... how America 'manages' Eurasia is critical. Eurasia is the globe's largest continent and is geopolitically axial. A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions ... About 75 per cent of the world's people live in Eurasia, and most of the world's physical wealth is there as well... Eurasia accounts for about 60 per cent of the world's GNP and about three-fourths of the world's known energy resources ... Eurasia is thus the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played.'*

*Zbigniew Brzezinski,  
The Grand Chessboard*

*Zbigniew Brzezinski, who audaciously named the project of global primacy, is more dovish than the cabal surrounding President Bush. But even the doves identify with the goal of Full Spectrum Dominance.*

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The purpose of this article is to explore some features of the international politics of the US campaign against 'international terrorism'. Part one examines the American response to 11<sup>th</sup> September and the immediate prospects in the Afghan War. Part two looks at the wider geopolitical context of the war and at US strategy in these fields. Part three considers more underlying issues including repercussions for political movements. This will then enable us to draw certain conclusions about the key variants of future developments.

## I The American State Response to 11<sup>th</sup> September

Much of the commentary on the suicide airstrikes of 11<sup>th</sup> September fails to make a distinction on one crucial aspect of the event: who was on the receiving end of the airstrikes? There is a tendency to see only the thousands of dead citizens of the United States as being on the receiving end. But the most politically important target struck was the American *state* as a political force in the world. The distinction between the two is not a trivial one: there is no pre-given identity between the US state and the mass of its citizens. Juridically, of course their memberships overlap: officials within the US state apparatus are also US citizens. But the officials of the American state are trained to think rather differently from the mass of the citizenry. Each group has different perspectives, concerns and perceived needs. And they do not necessarily respond to 11<sup>th</sup> September in the same way.

The citizens of the United States have demanded action to bring the organisers of the attack to justice and to prevent such people ever doing that kind of thing again in the United States or indeed anywhere else. But the officials of the American state have had a distinctly different approach, to put it mildly, if very reputable and unchallenged press reports are to be believed. For example, Bob Woodward and

Dan Balz produced a series of lengthy, detailed accounts of activities and discussions within the top echelons of the Bush administration covering the week following September 11<sup>th</sup>. These reports, based on extensive interviews with the top Bush administration officials, appeared in the *Washington Post*. Woodward and Balz report that on the afternoon of 11<sup>th</sup> September itself, Bush had already ordered Rumsfeld to prepare a war against Afghanistan and al Qaeda. Although they claim that they knew nothing when they woke up that morning, by the afternoon war preparations against Afghanistan were already set in motion without, apparently, any top official suggesting that they should first try to find out who had organised the attack.<sup>1</sup>

On 12<sup>th</sup> September at the National Security Council with Bush in attendance, the main topic of debate was a rather surprising one, namely the danger that once the US had completed its campaign to crush al Qaeda (and presumably Afghanistan) the whole international coalition under US leadership might fall apart. There, says Woodward and Balz, Cheney insisted that the campaign should not just be against terrorism; it should also be against states that sponsor terrorism. Rumsfeld had already demanded a war against Iraq on the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup> and he raised it again at the National Security Council: Woodward writes that he wanted to make Iraq 'a principal target of the first round in the war on terrorism'. The State Department (Powell) and Shelton of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (the leaders of the military) were against, wanting to focus the campaign exclusively on al Qaeda and the Afghan state. Bush wanted first to mobilise public opinion on al Qaeda and Afghanistan but saw this as the first phase of a wider campaign that could include Iraq later.<sup>2</sup>

In short, the state leadership was focused on one big pre-occupation: how to use the attack of 11<sup>th</sup> September to advance an American grand strategy. As was later explained to Woodward the first 36 hours were vital because 'You've got to think of concepts and strategic action.'<sup>3</sup> Concepts and strategic action are rather different from a manhunt for the organisers of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the evident first concern of American citizens.

On the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> September at a Cabinet meeting Bush and Powell both stressed the same basic problematic in the field of strategy. Woodward and Balz stress in covering that meeting: 'Like Bush, Powell saw the attacks as an opportunity to reshape relationships throughout the world.'<sup>4</sup>

This is a concept rather divergent from the mood of the American citizenry at the time and far removed from the Bush public rhetoric: the concept that 11<sup>th</sup> September was an *opportunity* for America.

Another journalist who has also carried out interviews with a wide range of the key foreign policy officials of the Bush administration, Nicholas Lemann, provides further enlightenment on this concept of 11<sup>th</sup> September as an opportunity. He had lunch with National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and she again brought up the concept of 11<sup>th</sup> September as an opportunity, or rather as creating *opportunities* in the plural. Lemann reports as follows.

'Rice said that she had called together the senior staff people of the National Security

Council and asked them to think seriously about “how do you capitalize on these opportunities” to fundamentally change American doctrine, and the shape of the world, in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>. “I really think this period is analogous to 1945 to 1947,” she said – that is, the period when the containment doctrine took shape – “in that the events so clearly demonstrated that there is a big global threat, and that it’s a big global threat to a lot of countries that you would not have normally thought of as being in the coalition. That has started shifting the tectonic plates in international politics. And it’s important to try to seize on that and position American interests and institutions and all of that before they harden again.”<sup>5</sup>

Lemann also discusses another lunch he had, this time with a ‘senior’ official who Lemann does not name, though Cheney obviously comes to mind as the unattributable source. Whoever it was makes an important point about one of the great gains achieved by 11<sup>th</sup> September. Lemann reports as follows:

‘Inside government, the reason September 11<sup>th</sup> appears to have been “a transformative moment,” as the senior official I had lunch with put it, is not so much that it revealed the existence of a threat of which officials had previously been unaware as that it drastically reduced the American public’s usual resistance to American military involvement overseas, at least for a while.’<sup>6</sup>

This is surely a key political truth which at the same time underlines the absolute analytical necessity for viewing the American state as a political force which is radically distinct from the mass of American citizens. The fact was that try as they might during the 1990s the American state élite had not been able to pull the US public over to supporting their burning ambition for an assertive militarism abroad. Finally, with 11<sup>th</sup> September, they could now bridge that gulf.

This is not actually a new problem in the United States, nor is it just a post-Vietnam problem. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had a lot of difficulty pulling the US public behind entry into the Second World War. Wilson had to work hard also to pull the American people into the First World War. And at least in those cases leaders could point to major powers that might threaten US interests. A closer analogy for the problems of the US state with the US people in the 1990s was the problem that Teddy Roosevelt faced in the 1890s when he and other US state leaders were eager for a big US naval build-up and an assertion of US military power abroad. Roosevelt was so frustrated that he toyed with the idea of hoping that the Germans might burn down New York and other coastal cities to persuade the US population to build a strong navy. Teddy Roosevelt was a New Yorker with seven generations of New Yorker Roosevelts behind him. But as historian David Burton explains this did not inhibit him as Assistant Secretary for War from sharing his idea with the British Ambassador to Washington. In Burton’s words, he ‘confided to Sir Cecil Spring-Rice that shock might be the best treatment after all for dispelling Americans’ foolish illusions about naval preparedness. “Frankly, I don’t know that I should be sorry to see a bit of a spar with Germany,” he said; “the burning of New York and a few other sea coast cities would be a good object lesson on the need of an adequate system of coast

defence.””” 11<sup>th</sup> September was, from the angle of Teddy Roosevelt’s successors in the US presidency, evidently from the account of Lemann, just the kind of shock needed to pull the American people around to a new dose of militarism.

*The optic of the American state: a first approximation*

When the leaders of the American state sit down to work out how they could use 11<sup>th</sup> September to advance their grand strategy through a co-ordinated series of new tactics their optic must encompass all the major internal and external relations of the American state in both economics and politics and their vision must situate these relations in historical perspective.

It may appear that the US response has been overwhelmingly focused upon Western Asia and the Middle East: the Afghan war, Sharon’s war against the Palestinians and the projected US war against Iraq. This has indeed been the main regional focus of US military-political activity. And it is a very important region for the US, which has been engaged in long-term coercive activity there for decades with substantial economic and political interests at stake. It has bases and forces scattered across many states of the region and offshore. It is involved in a siege war against Iraq (which has been going badly for three years), supporting the Israeli occupation, ensuring its control over Gulf oil, defending various authoritarian Arab regimes and protecting very large US business interests throughout the region: the financial flows into New York and the arms sales across the region alone are very substantial interests. For example, some \$600 billion of Saudi money is parked in New York to the enormous benefit of the US economy. The mainly Saudi suicide attacks in the US challenged the American state to strike back in the region and to defend its interests and clients there.

But the US drive within the region after 11<sup>th</sup> September cannot be about purely regional objectives. It must be about using change in the region to change global political and also economic relationships to the advantage of the American state. In this context we must remember that the US military-political thrusts in the region have transformative effects in three directions: on regional actors, but also on all the other main global powers and their populations; and also on domestic American constituencies. And indeed US regional goals themselves cannot be understood purely in terms of the regional interests of the US. US goals in other directions can themselves reshape the purely regional goals.

*Afghan war and coalition against terrorism*

In the first days after 11<sup>th</sup> September, then, the Bush administration worked out a set of tactics to use the suicide airstrikes against New York and Washington to advance US grand strategy. The main tactical components directly connected to the suicide bombings were the following:

1. A sequencing approach to military strikes moving first to crush the Afghan state and then to destroy the Iraqi Baathist regime. A key tactical issue would be how to manage the transition from phase one to phase two, without

- disrupting the new bond with the American population.
2. The construction of a new kind of hub-and-spokes alliance structure for other world powers to join combined with a politics of threatening these other powers that if they didn't join they would be treated as hostile to the United States – 'you're either with us or against us' as Bush has kept repeating.
  3. A use of 1 and 2 to sweep away a series of arms control and other international agreements which the Bush administration viewed as blocking central goals of the administration's strategy. By removing these obstacles the US could lay the basis for the new Bush 'global doctrine'.
  4. The new global doctrine would thematise the practical activity of the US against Afghanistan and later Iraq. It would say that the US had the right and duty to attack states which supported terrorism or which combined hostility to various US policies with attempts to develop weapons of mass destruction.

All these objectives seem to have been identified by the Bush team within the first few days of 11<sup>th</sup> September. Of course, many of these objectives were not actually new at all. War to overthrow the Iraq Baath, the scrapping of the arms control agreements like the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty, and giving the US the right to launch aggressive wars against hostile states were all Bush goals from the time of his election. And as we shall see, there were other important elements in the campaign that were not new either. Indeed Rumsfeld had been supplying the basic overall concept that was to emerge in the new strategy for months before 11<sup>th</sup> September, as Woodward reports: 'Rumsfeld said he believed that US power was needed to help discipline the world.'<sup>8</sup>

To understand the meaning of Rumsfeld's cryptic formula we must go back to the basics of the US state debate about grand strategy after the Soviet collapse.

## II

### The wider geopolitical context and strategy

Robert Gilpin wisely remarked in the mid-1990s that 'there is no consensus on who in fact really won the Cold War, if indeed anyone did'. Put another way, world politics since the Soviet Union collapsed has been precisely about who has won the Cold War. Is it a collegial victory of the capitalist 'West', in other words of the dominant social groups of the transatlantic world, is it a victory for this group plus the Chinese elite and the emergent Russian bourgeoisie, or is it an American victory relative to the others or, a West European victory relative to the others? It cannot be a victory for all these variants. We must examine the effects of the Soviet collapse on the relative power positions of different states. And this, in turn, requires us to grasp what the configuration of powers was before the Soviet collapse.

Right through until the end of the 1980s, *the capitalist world* was unipolar and under American leadership. The US was the military guardian state over the capitalist core and the other main capitalist states were, in effect, military-political protectorates of the US. This was most evidently the case for the most economically powerful of these states, Germany and Japan. But it applied also to

France and Britain. They were dependent protectorates in the military-political field for one basic reason: their basic military security depended on the US-Soviet relationship. An American-Soviet war could mean curtains for them. NATO and the US-Japanese security alliances were simply the institutional expressions of that reality. Of course, this was not an inevitable consequence of military power balances. It was the result of the political choice of these other states to align themselves with the US against the USSR and Communism after the war. And the choice that these states made reminds us that states are the political casings of social systems dominated by particular social classes with particular conceptions of their social interests. In the late 1940s these social interests drove the political choices which produced the protectorate system.

It is important to note that this US protectorate system was organized to give the US *unilateral* power. The British governments of the late 1940s and early 1950s tried to persuade Washington to make the protectorate system a bilateral, Anglo-American system, with the US jointly deciding policy for it protectorate system with the British. But Washington would not agree to this. It insisted and always insisted that it had the right to decide global policy affecting the protectorates alone: unipolarity plus multilateral consultation if convenient but plus unilateralism if necessary.

In the official ideology of the protectorate system, that system was *a means* to the *end* of 'containing' the Soviet threat. But objectively means and ends could be viewed also in the reverse direction. The containment of the Soviet Union could thus also be the means to the end of maintaining US political dominance over the rest of the capitalist core. And indeed, that perspective was evidently decisive when tensions and economic rivalries amongst the capitalist powers became intense in the 1970s and into the 1980s. The Reagan administration sought to use its power over the protectorate system to restructure socio-economic relations in favour of American capitalism.

But that 'restructuring' was far from completed when the USSR retreated from Eastern Europe and then collapsed. This presented the American state with an acute dilemma. The Soviet collapse liberated Western Europe from security dependence on the US-Soviet relationship. The key pillar of the subordination of Western Europe as a protectorate system crumbled. (Japan and South Korea, on the other hand remained as protectorates, given the rise of China and the division of the Korean Peninsula). What should the United States do in these circumstances? Should it pull back from the protectorate game in Europe and let Europe float free? Or should it instead attempt to rebuild the security dependence of Western Europe, mindful of the fact that such rebuilding could only be achieved by *extending* the system of hub-and-spokes protectorates much further East, deep into the heartlands of Eurasia? In short, it would mean extending US unipolar unilateralism to the entire globe.

This project for extending the protectorate system into a global unipolar system quickly established itself as overwhelmingly dominant in Washington's mainstream National Security elites in the early 1990s. This orientation first

emerged clearly in a defensive form in the Bush Snr. administration's Defence Planning Guidance document of late 1991 which indicated that the greatest threat to US national security lay in regionalist unification moves among advanced industrial countries – in other words Europe and East Asia. Grand strategy had to be geared to defeating such moves. To do so would require the preservation and extension of US military-political dominance over these regions. This document was leaked (probably deliberately as a public warning to Western Europe) to the *New York Times* in early 1992.<sup>9</sup> The Clinton administration accepted the core concepts of this strategy, with National Security Adviser Anthony Lake sloganising it in September 1993 as 'From Containment to Enlargement'. Paul Wolfowitz, the key author, along with Lewis Libby, of the Bush Snr. doctrine acknowledged this continuity in grand strategy from Bush Snr. to Clinton in a 2000 article in the *National Interest*. And he went on:

'One would like to think that this new consensus – Buchanan apart – reflects a recognition that the United States cannot afford to allow a hostile power to dominate Europe or Asia or the Persian Gulf; that the safest, and in the long run the cheapest, way to prevent this is to preserve the U.S.-led alliances that have been so successful... But in reality today's consensus is facile and complacent... Still, one should not look a gift horse in the mouth. There is today a remarkable degree of agreement on a number of central points of foreign policy. No one is lobbying to withdraw troops from Korea, as was the case as recently as the late 1980s. No one is arguing that we should withdraw from Europe. American forces under President Clinton's command have been bombing Iraq with some regularity for months now, without a whimper of opposition in the Congress and barely a mention in the press. Even on ballistic missile defence there is today an emerging consensus that something needs to be done...'<sup>10</sup>

Wolfowitz and Lewis Libby returned to office with Bush Jnr, along with their patron, Dick Cheney and they have been central to the evolution of US external strategy in the Administration. Thus, although the rhetoric and tactics of US external policy shifted greatly between administrations, there has been a basic continuity of national strategy. Of course, those who imagine that American external policy is worked out by voters, parties and party leaders clashing with each other must find this notion of strategic continuity impossible to grasp. It sounds like a 'conspiracy'. But this puzzlement derives from a failure to move beyond ideological preconceptions about the nature of the American state (and other advanced capitalist states).

### *The politics and economics of grand strategy*

The question remains as to why this strategy for unipolarity or global military-political primacy was adopted. Some see it as driven by the US military. This is quite wrong. While the US military of course plays a significant role in deciding military tactics in US wars, it plays a very small role in formulating grand strategy (and the views of the top brass are not necessarily hawkish at all on strategic issues). Others like David Calleo see the strategy as driven by various

interest groups in particular sectors, such as defence industries, oil, etc. as well as by groups whose career structures depended upon the continuity of a Cold War posture.<sup>11</sup> While this approach has some force it is not a sufficient explanation by any means. For as William Pfaff has rightly stressed, the strategy is supported by the broad mass of the internationally oriented US business class. As Pfaff puts it:

‘An implicit alliance has emerged in Washington since the Cold War’s end: internationalist liberals, anxious to extend American influence and to federate the world’s democracies, and unilateralist neo-conservatives, who believe in aggressive American leadership for the world’s own good, have joined forces... A hegemonic spirit... underlies both the liberal activism and the neo-conservative unilateralism.’<sup>12</sup>

The notion of interest group capture as an explanation for US policy often reverses cause and effect. Thus, some may think that because a former Enron executive is currently Secretary for the Army, US military policy is being geared to profits for Enron. But the US state is more serious than that. In reality, because US grand strategy points to the need for the US to extend its control over the whole region from the Gulf to the Caspian, it needs people who understand the oil business running the show. And throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American state has drawn the bulk of the top officials for running the military and other externally oriented agencies from the US business class and big corporate law firms. This distinctive US approach derives from a crucial insight, namely that economics and military-political action must be integrated as one.

This insight is, of course, contradicted by official US ideology and orthodox US academic International Relations theory. Both insist that economics should be free from politics and military-political contest has nothing (much) to do with economics. But the whole point about US grand strategy is that the two must march together. The protectorate system during the Cold War enabled the US to use its military-political leverage over the rest of the capitalist core to assure the protection and advancement of US business interests abroad. And the same need dictates grand strategy today.

But it is also important to see how the military-political and the economic fit together. The American state does not, of course, threaten Japan or Western Europe with military attack to open their markets! It uses its military power within the core *indirectly*: this power shapes the external security environment of other core states in ways that make them dependent on decisions taken in Washington. The three main ways of achieving this are through making the given state dependent on the military relationship between the US and another major power: for example Japanese dependence on the US-Chinese relationship or European dependence on the US-Soviet relationship; secondly by making the target power vulnerable to US military activity on its geographical periphery: for example, European states becoming vulnerable to US military-political operations in the Balkans; and thirdly by making the supply of raw materials inputs for the target power subject to US control over the sources of the inputs on their supply routes: for example in the field of Gulf-Caspian oil. All three of



these methods can then be cashed as US political influence over the economic policies of the other advanced capitalist powers.

On the economic side of this equation, the US state is pre-occupied with big structural arrangements rather than some manic effort to win every possible economic argument: the dominance of the dollar, freedom for the US treasury to manipulate the main exchange rates as it wishes, control over the regimes for international finance, opening other markets in key sectors of US dominance, such as telecoms and financial services in the 1990s, combating perceived high tech threats from, say, Japan in the late 1980s and 1990s etc. These broad structural goals are thematised as ‘economic globalisation’. Without these zones of market relations being encased within a military-political protectorate framework the US state and business class could not be confident of being able to shape the main legal-institutional arrangements of the world economy. And even with the protectorate system, there was always a great deal of bargaining and haggling over arrangements for the global political economy.<sup>13</sup>

### *The US drive to reorganise Eurasia up to Bush’s arrival*

We can now more easily trace the key issues and objectives for US grand strategy in the 1990s. The US had lost much of its military-political leverage over Western Europe because of the Soviet Bloc collapse; this had to be righted. Russia and the former Soviet Union were turning towards capitalism and insertion in the international division of labour; this had to be steered, avoiding a primary Russian-European linkage; in East Asia the protectorate system was still in place (thanks to China’s rise) but was difficult to manage because China’s turn to capitalism made it a huge honey-pot for American and other capitals as well as a military ‘threat’. And Japan was evidently developing a strong regional network and was keen to build a stronger regional institutional order. At the same time, other East Asian and South East Asian capitalisms were growing very strongly, were fairly closed to preponderant US penetration and lacked the vulnerabilities which the US economic statecraft instruments of the 1980s were designed to exploit: heavy state debt, fiscal crisis, chronic current account deficits. And in the Central zone of Eurasia, the Gulf/Caspian region new sources of oil and gas were entering the world scene and political capture of them by Western or Eastern Eurasia could free the two advanced capitalist regions from dependence on US control over Gulf oil.

In short, US grand strategy had the task of achieving nothing less than the shaping of new political and economic arrangements and linkages across the whole of Eurasia. The goal was to ensure that every single major political centre in Eurasia understood that its relationship with the United States was more important to it than its relationship with any other political centre in Eurasia. If that could be achieved, each such centre would be attached separately by a spoke to the American hub: primacy would be secured.

The US has come to these tasks with particular legacies of assets: its huge military apparatus and bases all over the world from the Cold War. Its equally large

intelligence apparatus. Its powerful levers of economic statecraft such as access to its market and its control over the international monetary and financial system as well as its control over credit-debt management agencies like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. But it also had the leverage of its multinational corporations and a formidable cadre of state officials with great administrative and policy skills and élan.

### *The East Asian theatre*

Washington successfully thwarted the Japanese impulses towards creating an institutionalized regionalism or a yen zone in the 1990s. The Clinton administration was overwhelmingly pre-occupied with trying to break open the political economies of the Pacific Rim capitalist states as part of its programme of reorganising capitalist social systems in American interests. It gained breakthroughs on that front in the East Asian financial crisis of 1997 (with some collateral damage such as the Indonesian blow-out). But the regionalist pressures were, if anything strengthened by the East Asian blow-out, not least because US Treasury operations, notably against Korea, were perceived as a potentially grave security threat by state élites in a number of these countries.

The major threat to US interests in the region since 1998 has been that China could lead a successful regionalisation either along or in cooperation with Japan. US policy has thus been geared towards trying to push Japan forward as a regional competitor against China, giving the US the options of either manoeuvring between the two with each dependent on it, or of taking the lead in a 'contain China' polarisation, causing flash-points with China either over Taiwan or North Korea.

The Bush team was picked with an evident desire to focus strongly on this region: both Wolfowitz in the Pentagon and Armitage in the State Department are East Asia hands. But policy got off to a clumsy start with the Chinese downing of a US spy plane and the tactical focus shifted after 11<sup>th</sup> September. Strong tactical activism in that region has been postponed. But US grand strategy nevertheless requires that post 11<sup>th</sup> September tactics help prepare the way for a future focus-shift towards China.

### *The European-Russian theatre*

The most urgent political task in these areas for the US in the 1990s was in the European theatre. It has carried out a decade of work on that zone with only partial success, or partial failure.

Successive US administrations have had an essentially bipartisan approach to their European problem. They have had three cardinal objectives. The first was to keep the main West European states split from each other in the military-political field with each fitted to the Washington hub as an isolated spoke. This was the old NATO system: the West Europeans were not allowed to sit down as an institutionalised collective to co-ordinate military-political policy without Washington and then talk collectively to Washington. There should be no separate West European military-political centre.

The second, linked objective was to block any West European collective and autonomous power projection eastwards and to prevent a West European sphere of influence from Germany to Russia. The US through NATO had to govern power projection eastwards and the US had to be the gatekeeper between Russia and the European Union states, pushing Russia out of European military-political institutional frameworks.

And the third US objective was to prevent the West Europeans from having any collective, independent power projection in the Mediterranean and towards the Middle East.

These three objectives amount to one single goal: to retain US hegemonic control over the military-political order of Europe: in other words a hub-and-spokes system on all the major issues of European politics and European political relations with Russia and the Middle East. In short, US Cold War hegemony over Europe should continue.

These objectives have clashed from early on with two cardinal German concerns: first to bind Germany's neighbours more tightly around Germany by also binding Germany to them. Since the end of the Cold War this could not just be in the form of economic regionalism: it had to take a political form. And that should be not a genuine federation but a real political bloc of concert, underpinning the Eurozone. Secondly, Germany was determined to draw the frontier belt states of East Central Europe – those states bordering Germany and Austria – firmly into close, secure, friendly and cooperative relations with Germany so that they would protect all key German interests. But this operation had to be processed through the European Union framework – not just bilaterally.

This German set of concerns also involved close co-operation with France. And the main trend (although not the only one) in French state élites has been to project French military-political power principally at a European regional level, using French power projection to give France claims to political leadership in the European Union. This French orientation chimed with German interests.

Thus from 1990 France and Germany were headed for confrontations with the United States. These confrontations have not been open and have not involved the various powers mobilising masses of people behind them in the struggle. The struggles have instead gone on behind closed doors in NATO, the European Union and other bodies and through practical moves and attempted *faits accomplis* in the military-political and diplomatic area. But the struggles have been very real and very tense at times, especially in the Western Balkans. The Bosnian war both occurred and ran so long in major part as a by-product of these West-West struggles. The NATO-Serbia war was first and foremost an American manoeuvre within these struggles. And the British state, starting out as a loyal pro-American on these issues, ended up moving to link up to a considerable degree with France and Germany. This shift by the British, organised under Blair from 1998 was the result, in large part, of shock over the brutal disregard of the US for European and British security interests in the Western Balkans.

Thus a European caucus has been emerging, in the teeth of fierce US hostility.

It is emerging in the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). It is not a very solid caucus and it has not given itself any very obvious practical path to development and consolidation in action: it is largely confined to institution-building.

On the other hand, the US has managed to dominate the military-political side of Western expansion into the former Soviet Bloc. It is building its own political-security clients between Germany and Russia (with Poland in the lead) and it has effectively excluded Russia from the institutions of European military-political debate and decision. It has thus become the gatekeeper between Russia and Western Europe. As for French attempts to gain some European coordination in the Mediterranean within a NATO framework, the Clinton administration reacted with ferocious diplomatic brutality distorting the French demand in order to stamp on it.

But the West European states have continued to seek to build up their international political influence as a caucus. They have done so by developing a stronger civilian political diplomacy and one with a real edge against the United States. It focuses on rule-based treaty regimes on a global scale instead of power politics, it stresses the peaceful resolution of conflicts, it stresses rule-based human rights regimes etc. They also demand a more collegial form of global government in which the US cannot decide all the big issues unilaterally. There have even been signals of a European interest in linking up with East Asian states against Washington on certain important issues, something that would be a matter of great concern in Washington.

Thus there is a real though still fragile and not very strong EU-centred West European game of building a more cohesive and autonomous base rather than returning to protectorate status. European tactics could be described as subversive bandwagoning. The European Union states seek always to avoid a head-on confrontation with the US whenever it launches a war drive: they seek to fall in behind, but at the same time they seek to find and assert differentiating points at a later date and they also seek to respond to US initiatives by measures to strengthen European cohesiveness.

Policy élites in Washington in 2001 viewed these developments with real hostility. As the Bush team entered office it sent warning signals to Europe via the British media. The *Daily Telegraph* was given a briefing by a top Bush official which was full of dark threats towards Europe under the heading, 'President Bush to Europe: Its No More Mr. Nice Guy'. This made clear that the European Security and Defence Policy – autonomous power projection and a European caucus in NATO – was unacceptable to Washington. The *Financial Times*' US correspondent spelt out Bush group-think very clearly just after Bush's inauguration: 'A common EU approach in NATO's councils...is anathema to US foreign policy doctrine. Those close to Mr. Bush have made it clear the US will not tolerate an agreed EU approach to NATO questions.' The correspondent added that an adviser to Bush was warning the Europeans that they were threatening a 'political decoupling' of the US from Europe.<sup>14</sup> Words like 'anathema' and 'will not tolerate' and 'political decoupling' were powerful

threats. But Bush did not dare to confront the European Security and Defence Policy head-on: it would devise other methods of resubordinating Western Europe, methods that would emerge clearly after 11<sup>th</sup> September.

### *The central zone*

Apart from its direct strategies towards the two Rimlands, the third prong of US grand strategic turn during the 1990s was focused upon the belt of states running East from Moldova through the Caucasus and the Caspian to the Chinese border with Kirghizia. The stakes have been such energy states as Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan with Georgia as an oil conduit. The key potential partner states in addition to Turkey were to be Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The rivals were Russia and Iran. Here the aim of successive American administrations has been to extend US military-political control over the sources of energy on which the world economy depends and will increasingly depend as well as controlling the energy transportation routes from these sources. Such political control is thematised as providing a military-political service to the rest of the capitalist world. But historical experience (particularly from the 1970s) shows that it can equally be used as a powerful lever of US statecraft to exert coercive pressures on the rest of the capitalist world, as well as securing US oil supplies and giving the US influence over oil prices. The alternative trend to US control would be a West European-Russian-Iranian energy axis on one side and a potential Chinese-Iranian-Russian energy axis on the other.

It is worth emphasising that US interests in these matters are not simply or even mainly about US oil companies making profits from energy resources. This is nice but secondary. Indeed one of the tactics of the US state for undermining Russian state influence can precisely be drawing Russian oil and gas companies into Caspian consortia. The crucial issue is effective overwhelming political influence over the states sitting on the energy reserves. The Clinton administration has stated unambiguously that this is a vital US strategic interest – very strong language in the code of US security discourse indeed. No one can imagine that Bush's oil boys are any less sensitive to the geopolitics of energy than the Clinton team.

The battle for the Caspian has flowed back and forth for more than ten years: there have been the two wars in Chechnya, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Abkhazia war in Georgia. The American drive for influence has been countered by Russia with its linkage to Iran and its alliance with Armenia. The US had had one striking and very important success in gaining leverage in Azerbaijan. But more recently the United States has suffered significant reverses. First, despite Washington's pressure, Turkey was not prepared to give strong security guarantees to states like Azerbaijan and Georgia. Secondly, the US had pushed hard to build a general political axis across the central belt, centred in Ukraine and stretching to Uzbekistan: the so-called GUUAM Bloc (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova). But this axis was severely weakened as Putin successfully exploited a crisis in Ukraine to pull the

Ukrainian President, Kuchma, into a tighter relationship with Moscow. And a further disastrous set-back occurred when the government of Turkmenistan broke off its dealings with Washington about giving it control over Turkmen gas, switching alliances to Moscow.

The state which ties the Caspian to the Gulf is Iran. With Washington at loggerheads with Iraq during the 1990s, Iran had, effectively, a buffer on its West. Washington, on the other hand, had Saudi Arabia and Israel and Turkey as well as Egypt. But from 1998 a decisive US advance, through militarily crushing the Iraqi Baathist regime, and then moving strongly against Iran, was blocked. The Arab states refused to support stronger US aggression against Iraq because of Washington's stance on the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The French took the same line as did the Russians. And the Europeans as a whole effectively weighed in on the same side by pushing for Washington to press Israel into further concessions to the Palestinians. And the Germans as well as the French insisted that any aggression against Iraq would need a UN Security Council Resolution, something that the Russians and probably the Chinese would block, especially after the NATO adventure against Serbia. Meanwhile the European-Russian energy axis, linking up with Iran was developing as Bush came into office. Even the British were in on the act, with Shell getting stuck in.

The Bush team, as it entered office, was determined to break these coalitions up and sweep forward decisively through Iraq on to Iran and further North into the Caspian. It viewed the Sharon government in Israel as a key instrument for new US tactics.

### III

#### **Making sense of the Bush campaign tactics in terms of US Grand Strategy**

We can now place the Bush Campaign Against Terrorism in the context of US grand strategy and in the Eurasian political environment as it appears from the angle of Washington's grand strategy.

*The Afghan War:* an assertion of US military power after 11<sup>th</sup> September was essential to demonstrate US 'resolve' to the world and Afghanistan was an appropriate target for this, one that could command very wide diplomatic support. At the same time it enabled the US to leap openly into Central Asia, thus strengthening its position to the East of the Caspian across energy routes to China and also extending the circle of military bases around China for use in the future.

*A hegemonic hub-and-spokes alliance:* the US said all states should join the coalition or be treated as hostile. But this was a coalition without a formal collective structure: each state was to bilaterally plug its spoke into the Washington hub. And Washington would set the overall objectives of each phase of the potentially endless campaign. NATO could go to hell and with it the European caucus within NATO and the European Security and Defence Policy. Any European state wishing influence in Washington should compete with its European neighbours for such influence.

*From Afghanistan to Iraq:* this, of course, was the big gear change, post-11<sup>th</sup> September, to the really big strategic objectives. The shift was thematised as states harbouring terrorists and *weapons of mass destruction* and the anthrax attacks in the United States obviously helped sensitise American opinion to the risk from Iraqi biological weapons. Washington knew perfectly well that the West Europeans, initially including the British were against an invasion of Iraq. They would be made to squirm by American 'resolve'. And Washington had an ace it thought in this battle: Ariel Sharon.

*The Sharon Instrument:* while the Afghan air-war was underway, the US kept Sharon in reserve and Sharon and Bush put down seemingly positive markers about a 'Palestinian state'. But with the occupation of Kabul, Washington let Sharon off the leash. He could crush the Palestinian Authority's infrastructure, assassinate its personnel, destroy Palestinian cities etc., while Washington would sit on its hands. The Arab regimes allied to Washington would scream for US intervention and the Europeans would do likewise. But Washington would refuse to intervene, *except on one condition:* that the Arab regimes (and the Europeans) would back aggression to destroy the Iraqi state. Then and only then would Sharon be reigned in.

*The 'Axis of Evil' and the Bush Doctrine:* this State of the Union speech spelt out war with Iraq, a possible war against Iran and against North Korea and a right for the US to wage aggressive wars against states deemed hostile and trying to acquire deterrent weapons (weapons of mass destruction). And such US aggression against sovereign states need not have any sanction from the United Nations Security Council.

*Scrapping the ABM Treaty* and driving for a US missile defence system, thus ensuring that the US could be protected against hostile states' weapons of mass destruction.

The whole thrust of the campaign is evidently focused upon the Middle East. If it progresses it will demonstrate to the world that the entire European line on the Middle East for a quarter of a century counts for nothing and Western Europe is impotent in world politics. If it doesn't go well there will be a long confrontation between parts of the Arab world and the United States and Western Europe will be vulnerable to the US-Israeli relationship to the Arab world, a substitute for the old European dependence on the US-Soviet relationship.

The campaign so far has not been a great success. The Bush team did not reckon on the Palestinian counter-terror. It also did not reckon on the mass mobilizations in the Arab world and beyond against Sharon-Bush. Cheney was sent out to the Arab world to talk about war on Iraq and he came back mumbling about Palestine, to the fury of the leaders of the American right. Blair promised to lead the propaganda war against Iraq with a dossier justifying an attack and he also said there was no need for a new United Nations resolution to justify the war. But the dossier never appeared and Blair started mumbling about the need, after all, for a United Nations Security Council resolution. Although plans had been made for an attack against Iraq in late spring or early summer, the Bush administration was forced into a retreat.

But Washington cannot abandon its drive to crush Iraq without suffering terrible political humiliation. It has turned to an even harder line on Palestine, with the leader of the (majority) Republican Party in the House of Representatives, Congressman Arney calling for the wholesale expulsion of Palestinians from the West Bank. The aim is to break the *Intifada* and utterly crush the Palestinian people, then try to impose one of the CIA-linked Palestinians on the Palestinian people as a prelude for an Iraqi war.

#### IV

### **Broader issues and factors**

Central to US grand strategy is the drive to ensure that US military power remains the critical political asset in the post-Cold War world. For this is the United States' strong suit in international politics. The main powers with the social resources to be competitors with the United States, Germany and Japan, are a potential political threat because they have a very strong interest in a world order in which military power plays a minor role, acting only as a last resort in the face of genuine anti-capitalist challenges rather than being the everyday coinage of international political life.

It remains an open question as to how *politically* effective military power will be for the US in its efforts to gain global primacy. The US can destroy any state it likes, but this is not necessarily good politics. It can produce not only nasty backlashes but also something very unpleasant for other capitalist powers: chaos, disintegration, huge movements of refugees and migrants, and a whole range of transnational social effects of shattered social structures lasting for decades: this is evident now in the Western Balkans and Afghanistan and Iraq.

Secondly, the strategy for primacy is about the US laying down rules for others and quite different rules for itself. It can choose which 'terrorism' to attack, which state it wishes to crush. But India, China, Russia must not do that. This is a difficult trick to win.

And the European Union states have a rather coherent alternative world order concept to assure Atlantic dominance. This is the concept of tying other states into a system of international law which you also subordinate yourself to; but in addition it is you and your allies which write the actual law. And although this law is thematised in terms of principles and norms, it is actually just a hodgepodge of 'positive law' which suits the dominant states. That is the European Union way of doing international politics and it has a powerful appeal to all other advanced capitalist states – except of course the United States. The International Criminal Court is a classic example. It is thematised as defending human rights and stopping war crimes but it happens to leave out any sanctions against aggression or military occupation. So for the International Criminal Court the important thing about aggression is how you do it, and, of course, how those attacked behave.

And along with this rather powerful idea, the European Union states demand a collegial management of international affairs by the G8, rather than a US diktat, again an approach that appeals to other capitalist states, except of course the US.



Of course, the US has always had one big trump card in world politics: its domestic order has had no serious challenge whatever from the left and thus it was able to be an intransigent enemy of the socialist left around the world. This has been an immensely potent source of endearment on the part of capitalist classes everywhere for the American state. And in return for US services against the left and labour many states have been ready to pay a very large price to the US in terms of all kind of egregious privileges and perks. But it is far from clear that this US quality is at a premium today for other advanced capitalist states. And the political and economic price of these US services seems as inflated as the perks required by American Chief Executives in the recent bubble years.

Of course, it is true that during the 1990s a strong social movement developed across the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to follow the US down the neo-liberal, rentier road to the kind of untrammelled capitalist social power that existed in some inter-war countries and in the days before the First World War. And this social movement was connected to the great boom in the American economy, which acted like a magnet and an inspiration to the capitalist classes of much of Europe and other advanced capitalist states.

But that bubble has now burst and the recession in the US could become very deep. To prevent that happening, the Bush administration desperately needs help from abroad. It needs help with managing the decline of the dollar and it needs wide ranging macro-economic co-ordination and support. And it needs this collegial multilateralism now: it cannot wait until its had its victory over Iraq.

In short, world politics is genuinely at a turning point. Condoleeza Rice says she thinks its 1947. In terms of US military power she may be right. But where is the credit power, where is the dynamic industrial engine? When you have those things, the military sword can indeed enable you to expand your influence across the globe. But when your military apparatus is harnessed to an enormous foreign debt, a tottering dollar, a gigantic trade deficit, a ballooning budget deficit, a mountain of consumer debt and corporate bulimia, George W does not seem all that much like Harry Truman. Indeed, one is inclined to ask an impertinent question: who, Mr. President, is going to pay for this Iraqi war? Will it be the Saudis, Germans and Japanese again like last time? Or will the Saudis and the Emirates just pull some of their \$600 billion plus out of New York? And will the Germans and Japanese say that last time it was about Kuwait but this time it is about a very ugly pig in a poke? And what about the American people? Will they welcome a war to get their minds off their pension problems? Or will they have got sick of Bush and Cheney and think, unkindly, that crushing Iraq is a diversion from the economy, stupid?

The Grand Strategy of the United States is bold and coherent in terms of the interests of American capitalism. The tactical concepts for the post-11<sup>th</sup> September campaign have been sophisticated at an intellectual level. But as so often in the past, there was a tendency to under-estimate the threat from mass resistance, this time in the Middle East. And the American economic blow-out is

a terrible worry. Bush and Rumsfeld probably had to try bombast and braggadocio to keep the domestic political mobilization going and to try to bluff their way towards a victorious campaign against Iraq. But it would be a cruel irony if the strategy and tactics for assuring the interests of American capitalism into the 21<sup>st</sup> century were ultimately sabotaged by collateral damage from the crisis of real, existing American capitalism today.

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