

The World Comes Apart

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As the fear of the Soviet Union that had unified the US-led alliance disappeared in 1991, Washington attempted to define a new international framework, one it could control more easily to confront better the perplexing multitude of new challenges facing it. The Soviet bloc's disintegration initiated what still remains its elusive, increasingly frustrating search. The crisis in the world economy after mid-1997 further intensified the bitter debate among former allies regarding trade blocs, Europe's and especially Germany's pursuit of a more autonomous political and economic strategy on the Continent, containing and guiding Japanese and Chinese economic and military power, and much else. The sheer diversity of grave problems confronting Washington was astonishingly complex. Even much more than at the beginning of the twentieth century, real and threatened nationalist and atavistic conflicts, both between nations and within them – in Africa, Afghanistan, the Middle East, the former Yugoslavia, and many other places – confirmed, if any confirmation were needed, that the spread of increasingly deadly weaponry today makes wars in all their forms the most imperative problem facing mankind.

The US in Korea and Vietnam had been unable to translate its enormous military power into political victories, but the situation it confronted after 1990 was far more perplexing because there was no longer an easily definable enemy on which to focus both its armed forces and diplomacy. Its policy in the Middle East had been a disaster and was instrumental in producing terrorism on a much larger scale than had ever been known. The very absence of a single adversary in concentrated places threatened both to neutralise its vast arsenal, undermine the principal justification for its burgeoning defence budget, and destabilise its foreign policy. Indeed, Washington's inability to reliably predict future crises made it much more

difficult for it to articulate priorities to orient its vast but ultimately finite resources for confronting the world.

Notwithstanding America's profound dilemmas, it remained more convinced than ever at the end of the century that it had both the ability as well as the right and moral imperative to guide the world's political and economic affairs whenever or wherever it chose to do so. The protracted economic crisis that began in the summer of 1997 in East Asia made the attainment of what it described as a new 'architecture' in the world economy especially imperative. But it also remained more obsessed than ever with maintaining the credibility of its armed might. This fixation on the symbolism of its military power had become an end in itself in Vietnam, and it is just as compelling today. Such reasoning makes the credibility of its arms an overriding goal, and it can dictate which political and military options are considered when challenges arise. In a word, the new crisis in American foreign policy began when the Soviet Union disappeared, long before George W. Bush became president.

The future of the Alliance system

In late 1998, Washington found the Germans, but particularly the French, reticent about its still vague ideas for transforming Nato into an alliance whose functions might also extend in unspecified ways beyond Europe's immediate borders. The US also envisioned this coalition as an opportunity to impose a new political and military arrangement on a post-Communist Europe that would pre-empt the emergence of a truly independent European security system with its own foreign policies.

America's project for Nato at the end of 1998 was also a response to its conflict with Iraq, which was about to resume. Its proposals were, above all, explicitly a reflection of the fact that there was no longer a Soviet strategic military threat for Nato to confront. As Washington envisaged it, dealing with terrorism, the spread of chemical and biological weapons, and nuclear proliferation were all to become crucial to Nato's new responsibility. Both its new geographical scope and potential military role were left obscure, but they might extend to 'rogue states' wherever they existed. More important, the US wanted the new Nato to act, if necessary, without first obtaining the approval of the United Nations, where Security Council vetoes could paralyse it. In effect, America aspired to create an organisation with a potentially unlimited mandate, immune to the cumbersome political rules that had governed the world after 1945, when Communism ostensibly posed a fatal danger. Nato was to be transformed from a staid defensive into an ambitious offensive alliance.

At the beginning of 1999, the unprecedented turmoil in the world economy was aggravating Washington's relations with many of its allies; European states and especially Japan frequently publicly criticised America's international economic role. Attempts to reduce the US mastery over the International Monetary Fund and World Bank appeared imminent, and the launching of a common European currency in 1999 immediately challenged the dollar's dominant role in the world

economy since 1945. This global economic environment and the disputes it generated created an inauspicious context both for the United States' ambitions for Nato as well as its pretensions to lead the world. France particularly attacked its unilateral and hegemonic political objectives.

Although the US no longer considered Russia as a threat to Europe, a view that the parlous state of its economy and political life fully justified, it still remained a nuclear superpower whose interests could not be casually dismissed. Officially, Washington desired friendly ties with Russia and a constructive 'engagement' with China, even though the Pentagon's November 1998 strategy statement for East Asia implied that China remained the single most important justification for its armed forces remaining in the region. Washington after 1991 could either cooperate with Russia or continue to constrain it, and despite comforting words, its actions were the only meaningful test of its intentions. The Clinton Administration's crucial decision in the summer of 1995 to enlarge Nato eventually to include Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic created a predictable nationalist upsurge in Russia and it was a major reason for the Communist-led bloc emerging as the strongest in the Russian Duma elections at the end of 1995. This decision, which was expanded to include the Baltic states in 2004, moved Nato 500 kilometres closer to Moscow and, whatever their politics, all Russians opposed the *de facto* cordon sanitaire Nato had built.

Wanted: credible enemies

America's goals in the world did not change and Communism's collapse in 1991 led, if anything, to a greater emphasis on economic rather than strategic objectives. The Clinton Administration, which held power from 1993 through 2000, like its predecessors, offered no innovations that might solve the mounting and increasingly awesome diplomatic and military problems bequeathed to it by a succession of Democratic and Republican presidents. Consensus rather than conflict is the hallmark of American politics, and that is just as true today. The Pentagon moved away somewhat from the US preoccupation with Europe and it focused far more on the Persian Gulf and especially East Asia and China, but these changes were of degree rather than kind. The 'uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies, and strategic resources,' to cite the Pentagon's 1996 annual defence report, was crucial even if it could not identify who could resist its 'unilateral use of military power' to protect America's 'vital national interests.' There were also mystical elements in the United States' vaguely defined mission to reform the way the world has existed and operated, but at its core these always identify the world's interests and that of America's as one and the same – and its unlimited hubris was and is essentially self-serving. But enlarging the number of 'free-market' nations, too, was no longer a problem; both China and Vietnam now believed passionately in the market and were well on their way to becoming capitalist in all but name. It thought an 'unpredictable' and 'uncertain future' was likely, and the world 'remains a complex, dynamic, and dangerous place,' but it could not pin down the reasons for its anxieties now that Communism had

virtually ceased to exist. It referred to ‘failed states’ and ‘dangerous technologies’ that were proliferating, but it was painfully silent on where and how all this was occurring. What was plainly clear is that the American military wanted to justify the budget that would allow it to modernise, ‘to retain military superiority’. But if nuclear power is the criterion, it had it already and no longer needed to spend prodigiously. Growing doubt was the hallmark of American thinking on its strategy and foreign policy after 1991.

Although Nato emerged more united than divided on the war in Kosovo, whatever goodwill remained among its members was largely dissipated by the anti-missile shield Washington talked of building to protect the American continent from an attack by technically sophisticated adversaries. Such a shield has been on the drawing boards for decades. Successive administrations mentioned North Korea, Iran, and Iraq as the possible culprits but no nation possesses the technical capacity to inflict sufficient damage before it is utterly devastated by an American riposte. Deterrence had kept the peace with the Soviet Union and exactly the same logic applied elsewhere. An arms race exists in South Asia and the Middle East but it is intended for regional enemies and scarcely a threat to the US, with its overwhelming nuclear supremacy. In fact, however, the Pentagon implied the real enemy was China and perhaps others, but it was too impolitic to state this openly. Moreover, should the anti-ballistic missile shield work then mutual deterrence, the basis of the United States’ strategic nuclear theory for decades, would end; it could strike any nation with impunity first, whether using conventional or nuclear weapons, and destroy any riposte. The only credible nuclear power would be the nation with an anti-ballistic missile shield – the United States. It would make its military adventures much more feasible, and therefore all the more likely.

The prospect of America building the anti-ballistic missile shield had, by early 2000, created deep dissension within the Nato alliance, alienated Russia (its 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty with the US would have to be annulled) and spread suspicion in every direction. But such a system became a football in American politics and a gargantuan plum for defence contractors. It was all liabilities, and while its research had cost at least \$71 billion as of 1999, it was technically and politically a very bad idea – save among the contractors building it.

US allies thought the idea dangerous and so did the Russians. Rand experts concluded it would be ‘practical and economical’ for Russia to overcome the American system, but nominally it was no longer an enemy. But the Congressional Budget Office in April 2000 wrote that even a limited system would cost \$60 billion – and it might not work. Indeed, the system was potentially open-ended in terms of expenses, and every phase of it had to be technically perfect. At worst, Rand experts warned, a partial system would create all liabilities and offer no protection, and prove a great waste of money. That is exactly what has happened. In 2004 the missile defence system failed both of its tests, the first in two years.

The anti-ballistic missile shield was first proposed by Ronald Reagan in 1983

and has yet to be proven feasible. But its astonishing persistence until this day reflects the initial fascination that the Pentagon has for super-sophisticated technology, the extent to which it can be impervious to the obvious political implication of its fads, and of course the immense sums for defence contractors able to get pieces of the action. These contractors, and especially Lockheed Martin and Boeing, were crucial in eventually reversing the CIA's technical assessment in the mid-1990s that Iran, North Korea, and other 'rogue states' were incapable of building a credible missile delivery system in the foreseeable future. Technically, the anti-ballistic missile shield system the Clinton Administration proposed could not distinguish between real warheads and decoys, and its advocates were accused of rigging its tests – by 2000 there were also increasingly strong opponents of the anti-ballistic missile shield within the Pentagon, who thought it a waste of funds better spent in other ways. By late 2000 most of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were among them.

American-Russia relations were also increasingly damaged by this issue. Prime Minister Putin proposed new European defence arrangements and he went to North Korea in July 2000 in the hope of getting sufficient verbal assurances from Kim Jong Il to stop Washington from pursuing what appeared like an anti-ballistic missile shield system which *de facto* was aimed at Russia. America's friends in Europe saw it as an example of its emerging unilateralism, and even Defence Secretary William S. Cohen, the anti-ballistic missile shield's strongest advocate within the Clinton Administration, confessed that he was uncertain of the vast, expensive enterprise's technological premises – 'That remains to be determined'. An 'act of terrorism taking place on the United States is more likely than [an] intercontinental ballistic missile' he conceded, and all the American intelligence agencies at the beginning of 2002 concurred that weapons of mass destruction are more likely to be delivered by some means – boats, airplanes, and the like – for which the anti-ballistic missile shield is utterly useless. The Pentagon tested the system in early July 2000 and it failed again. The Administration had alienated its allies in Europe, muddied relations with Russia, and caused China to worry it was really the anti-ballistic missile shield's principal target. In fact, the Clinton Administration also wanted to help Vice President Al Gore get elected, and so it favoured the anti-ballistic missile shield to make it appear as if the Democrats were as bellicose on military spending as their opponents.

The dilemma of a world with elusive enemies

What was gone, as one general told a Senate committee in January 1998, was 'the bi-polar nature of superpower competition [that] allowed for substantial continuity in US defence planning and force development.' Variations of these themes suffuse all Pentagon justifications for higher budgets. In the five years ending in fiscal 2005 the Pentagon asked for \$1.6 trillion! It wanted more modern weapons – nuclear, conventional, anything – against unnamed enemies and targets. In reality, there are no longer credible enemies for its vast armada of advanced technology to destroy, but no American administration will concede what is obvious.

The Clinton Administration admitted in principle that there was a serious possibility that terrorism would now be more of a threat than wars as they had been fought for centuries, but encouraged the insatiable Pentagon demands for conventional war hardware, and in January 2000 – with an eye on the November 2000 presidential election – it added \$115 billion to the Pentagon's projected five-year Future Years Defence Plan, extending to 2005, far more than what the Republicans were calling for. It refused to sign the Ottawa Landmines Treaty, it opposed many of the terms of a proposed treaty controlling the small arms trade that the National Rifle Association disliked, and it strongly opposed linking the burgeoning American arms exports to criteria on a nation's human rights and democracy record. The United States' already dominant share of the world arms market grew even larger – 32 per cent of the world trade in weapons in 1987, but 43 percent by 1997. Of the 140 nations it gave or sold arms to in 1995, 90 percent were not democracies or abused human rights. Not counting the ballistic missile defence system, at the beginning of 2001 the Pentagon had over a half-trillion dollars in major weapons systems in the pipeline, all of which the Clinton Administration had approved. It accounted in 1995 for nearly two-thirds of the world's spending on military research and development. In reality, there was no foreign military threat to even remotely justify these expenditures, only politically powerful contractors who would fight cutbacks.

By the time the Clinton Administration left office even Establishment critics believed its military and diplomatic priorities were profoundly awry and contradictory. A few former top officers said as much publicly. There simply was no inhibition on America's ambitions, even though it was perfectly evident that it had shown time and again that it was physically unable to do everything it was committed to attaining. Its repeated political failures only confirmed that the world had problems about which the US could do nothing, and it was to everyone's interest that it avoid getting involved in them. Its priorities, in reality, were often determined where there was shooting or wherever the American government had the desire to intervene, a readiness that its uninhibited foreign and military doctrines and goals made inevitable. The Pentagon's present emphasis on a 'capability-based' strategy admits that past priorities and perceived political threats were essentially wrong, and that the basic assumptions that guided US grand strategy since 1946 were erroneous.

Afghanistan was scarcely the only place that the CIA was to produce 'blowback', its expression to describe its foreign proxies who then turn on the US and its interests – the unintended consequences of covert operations. President Ronald Reagan's 'war on terrorism' meant arms for the contras in Nicaragua, who also peddled drugs to raise funds. On the other hand, it took a brief American invasion of Panama in late 1989 to remove from power Manuel Noriega, the commander of Panama's Defence Forces, who began as a CIA asset and later built huge drug operations.

But the most important area of US operations was in the Middle East, and especially the Gulf, which possesses the larger part of the world's oil reserves. Bin

Laden made this concern all the more certain by his turning on the absolutist, authoritarian Saudi élite that had initially sponsored him; the half-million infidels who entered the kingdom to defeat the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait which began in August 1990, and the approximately 5,000 American troops who remain until this day (plus a larger group of civilians who are connected with the military), as well as the air attacks on Iraq after its defeat, made him an enemy of the Saudi regime in the name of Islam. He still retains very important friends and sympathisers within the élite, although in 1994 they stripped him of his citizenship. Saudi Arabia was one of only three nations to recognise the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and there exists a close affinity between the two forms of Islam – which has made the Saudis extremely unreliable allies for the United States. Were people who agree with bin Laden to come to power there, it would create immense problems for Washington in a region absolutely vital to America's economic and strategic interests.

Terrorism comes of age: why terrorism?

The mood of crisis that has engulfed the United States since the awesome September 11, 2001 attacks on Wall Street and the Pentagon has its roots in a history that goes back nearly a half-century. It was virtually inevitable.

Terrorism has no rules. There is success or failure, winners or losers, and if the stakes are high and one side has few weapons then they employ what their enemies describe as terrorist methods. It is the weapon of the weak against the strong, of the poor against the highly organised, and its victims are, overwhelmingly, ordinary and quite innocent people. Many use them, and a few terrorist leaders are successful and achieve power, becoming respectable politicians. Some, indeed, eventually denounce those who get in their way as terrorists. If we examine the organisations once accused of terrorism – the Irgun and Stern Gang in Palestine, the African National Congress in South Africa, and innumerable other nations – we will also compile a who's who of successful political movements over the past century. The political causes that give rise to terrorism are integral to the way in which our world is organised. It existed in various forms a century ago and terrorism, in various guises, will continue.

There are, however, other forms of terrorism; the police and the military have over the past decades used torture and arbitrary arrests in Chile, Iran, Uzbekistan, Argentina, Indonesia, and countless other states where human right violations occurred constantly and routinely. This is terrorism also, state-sponsored, and it is much more extensive and expensive than the desperate and essentially random acts of violence that al Qaeda and comparable groups engage in. The United States has, since 1950, funded, trained, and supplied dozens of state-terrorist organisms to sustain regimes that were described as anti-Communist, but also those – like the 'contras' in Nicaragua during the 1980s – that employed violence, including terrorism which injured and killed many innocent civilians, to overthrow established governments. The United States today has bases in many states which violate human rights routinely, and it funds yet others. I do not deal with this much

more common and deadly form of terrorism, but America's sponsorship of this form of state-terrorism is one of the crucial reasons it now confronts violence on its own soil. More important, the United States has advised as well as fought many wars everywhere in the world since 1947: two major conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, but dozens of others, covert as well public. It has more enemies, by far, than any nation. The surprise is not that it was finally massively attacked on its own soil but that it took so long to occur. But symptoms of this form of warfare, of the weak against the strong, began to appear in the 1990s.

History has come full circle. Communism has disappeared and yesterday's freedom fighters in Afghanistan, many of them Islamic fundamentalists from other countries, are today's terrorists. There is a very high chance in coming years that we will again see enemies become friends and vice versa. Nothing is certain in global affairs; our world has become inordinately complex – not merely for the onlooker but, above all, for those men of power who seek to guide it. But although they cannot do so without creating more serious problems, most believe they can. Therein lies the danger.

The bombing of the World Trade Center underground garage in February 1993, in which six people died and hundreds were injured, presaged the future and terrorism against Americans on their own soil became a reality. Throughout the 1990s the federal government conducted hundreds of planning exercises, the large majority of which involved chemical and biological attacks – 'weapons of mass destruction' (WMD) – even though some of its experts argued that low-tech hijackings or bombs against symbolic targets were much more likely. Innumerable reports, documents, and policy directives on terrorism – dating back at least two decades – revealed that Washington had an acute consciousness, at least on paper, of terrorism's dangers against the United States itself. Bombings of American bases and embassies in Saudi Arabia in June 1996, in which nineteen US personnel were killed and 240 wounded, or Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998, which killed over 200 people, reinforced what was a widely shared belief in official circles that terrorism was a clear and present danger.

The roots of terrorism

Terrorism has many causes, but there is a vital economic basis for it, and persistent poverty, unemployment, and economic instability in the Third World is a crucial, indispensable reason for its growth. The structural causes of discontent – and terrorism – intensified in the 1970s and 1980s, but in many regards they became worse after the fall of Communism. Joseph E. Stiglitz, chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers from 1993 to 1997, has described the Clinton Administration's intensification of the 'hegemonic legacy' in the world economy. The 1990s were 'A decade of unparalleled American influence over the global economy in which one economic crisis seemed to follow another ...' The United States created trade barriers and gave large subsidies to its own agribusiness, but countries in financial straits were often compelled to cut spending on the poor and 'adopt policies that were markedly different from those that we ourselves had

adopted ...’ No nation was more influential in shaping the contours – and consequences – of the existing world economy. America gained; others lost badly.

The world was far more troubled economically however one measures it – and therefore politically also. Increasingly unequal income distribution in much of the Third World explains the persistence of discontent, and grossly inadequate economic growth much of the remainder. In Russia and East Europe this inequality, stagnant and declining economies, and the abolition of virtually all forms of social protection, has added greatly to the world’s poverty and human and social problems. International Monetary Fund insistence on poor nations balancing their budgets caused many countries to reduce the proportion of their gross domestic product allocated to health and education. Education, health, and transfer programmes in developing nations did not reverse growing income inequality, and often benefited mainly upper income groups. Latin America fared especially badly, with utterly inadequate social safety nets; in some nations during the 1990s there was a reversal of gains made in preceding decades, and despite economic progress in a number of places, there were many countries where economic and social conditions fed the supply of terrorists.

The number of hungry people in the world fell by 37 million during the first half of the 1990s, only to increase by 18 million during the second half – AIDS, civil wars, and drought helped to more than reverse the decline. There were 842 million undernourished people in 1999-2001. Regionally, only Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as China, succeeded in reducing the number of hungry people in the late 1990s. But in 2004 nearly half of Latin America’s half-billion population was still deemed poor. Even the optimistic assessments agree that economic changes have been minimal and in some regions have gotten worse. Indeed, the gap in health care standards between the rich and poor nations has widened over the past decade and in some countries, especially in Africa, the medical progress made over past decades has been reversed.

In all, 54 nations with 12 per cent of the world’s population had negative economic growth from 1990 to 2001 – especially sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe – and another 71 nations, with 26 percent of the world’s population, had zero to low growth and often failed to keep up with population increases. The per capita income of only sixteen developing nations grew at more than three per cent annually between 1985 and 2000, and mean per capita global gross domestic product growth in the decade ending 2003 was about a third of the 1961-68 increase. China accounts for most of the recent statistical progress that has occurred in East Asia and the entire world, but the per capita gross domestic product gap between the 20 richest and 20 poorest nations has more than doubled between 1960-62 and 2000-02 – from 54 to 121 times. Yet another measure is basic sanitation, and in 2004 the World Health Organisation reported that more than a billion people drink unsafe water and over 2.6 billion, or about 40 percent of the world population, have no access to basic sanitation. Diarrhoea kills about 1.8 million people annually, mainly children under five.

For all the less-developed-countries (LDC) combined, the percentage of the

population living on less than \$1 a day grew from 48 percent of the population in 1965-69 to 50 percent during 1995-99, meaning that the number of people living in extreme poverty more than doubled during that period, from 138 to 307 million people. The International Labour Office, on the other hand, estimates the number of working people in 2002 living on \$1 a day or less as 550 million – and the unemployed would make that figure far higher. While the ILO believes 1,237 million people lived in absolute poverty in 1990 and 1,100 million in 2000, China and India account for much of this progress. In 73 countries it surveyed, 48 of them – containing 59 percent of the population of the sample – had rising income inequality between the 1960s and the 1990s, 16 had stable inequality, and in only nine – with 5 percent of the population – was inequality declining.

The problem of hunger is linked to the persistence of unemployment and underemployment, which has been growing despite the growth of world gross domestic product. In 1993, there were 141 million unemployed in the world and looking for work but 186 million in 2003, in some nations more than others. Reliable figures on underemployment do not exist, but it is an immense problem. Unemployment is greatest in the Middle East and North Africa, reaching 26 percent in 2003 among youth in those regions – with inevitable political results in the form of extremism.

The outcome of trends such as these is that an increasing number of men and women become desperate – and terrorists. There is little doubt that the economic causes of terrorism have grown substantially and the collapse of the Left has meant that there are no secular answers to hunger, poor health, or unemployment. One cannot assign a precise weight to economics as a cause but informed observers think it a crucial and perhaps the most important factor. The failure of globalisation to bring a modicum of prosperity to an important part of the Third World has increased greatly the numbers ready to become terrorists. Many who turn to Islamic extremism do so for the same economic reasons that people once became secular revolutionaries, and to a crucial extent the rise of such groups is due to capitalism's failure to bring prosperity to poorer countries – which pits them not only against foreigners but their own rulers also.

An increasingly unstable world

Economic, social, and political transformations over the past several decades have made instability and great changes inherent in the modern historical experience. The American government acknowledges the fact there were structural causes of grave discontent but it still advocates the policies that perpetuate them, ranging from support for socially dysfunctional International Monetary Fund policies to subsidies for their own cotton, rice, and commodity producers that prevent Third World farmers from earning more for the crops on which they are dependent – thereby maintaining the unequal relationship between the rich and poor nations. The United States helped destroy most of the secular options in the Middle East and aided Islamic fundamentalists whenever they were useful. Above all, the United States has given Israel large amounts of economic and military aid and

supported many of its most aggressive policies until Israel became its proxy and further alienated the Muslim world. Now there is a storm of revenge – ‘blowback’ – fanning terrorism in ways that simply had not been the case 30 years earlier. Terrorism is the weapon of the weak and discontented, and they are more numerous than ever.

The difficulty, as the US Army admitted in discussing terrorism in May 1999, was that ‘These threats are much less predictable’ than when Communism existed, but the focus in official circles was overwhelmingly on chemical and biological weapons, or even nuclear bombs in suitcases – the weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Before the collapse of the Soviet bloc the United States had one enemy, clearly definable. Now it had many, often unknown to it, fighting in incredibly diverse ways for which its military was simply unprepared. When the CIA, in December 2000, sought to predict global trends for the next fifteen years, they too emphasised weapons of mass destruction, but they also predicted they would be used ‘against the United States itself’, and not only its bases and companies operating abroad. The problem for the United States was that its precise enemy was no longer obvious, leaving it in doubt that vastly complicated its calculations and capacity both for deterring an attack and retaliating once it had occurred. Indeed, it left its justification for an anti-ballistic missile system, whose future cost in July 2000 was estimated as at least \$60 billion over five years, in shambles. An American destroyer was attacked in Yemen in October 2000, killing seventeen sailors. By 2001 the federal government was spending nearly \$800 million in predicting and preparing for terrorism – efforts that ranged from abstractly calculating possible terrorist attacks to stockpiling essential equipment. Indirectly, it spent ten times that sum in combating terrorism, or what the Pentagon also clinically dubbed as ‘asymmetrical methods’. There were many official predictions that terrorism against the US homeland itself was only a matter of when, how, and where it would occur, but few – perhaps no one in power – quite believed them. The United States, and above all the military, was floundering for an effective strategic synthesis. There were now myriad threats confronting it, many of them opaque and indefinable.

The combined intelligence agencies’ annual budget in 2001 was \$30 billion, but they had no inkling whatsoever of an impending attack on Wall Street or the Pentagon. Despite warnings, the monumental events of September 11, 2001 were a profound shock, both symbolically and physically, to the United States. If in principle a terror attack, somewhere and at some time, was fully expected, in reality no one was prepared for the magnitude or the location of these attacks. Surprise, the ultimate ingredient in successful terrorism as well as warfare, was total. The entire world was deeply surprised but nothing in recent memory, perhaps since the Civil War, so seared the American people’s consciousness; for the first time since 1865, war’s frontline had arrived in the United States. After its immense efforts since 1945, it was more insecure than ever.

The 1999 war in Yugoslavia marked the beginning of a fundamental new phase in international relations. It was the beginning of the end of Nato, a gradual but irresistible process that President Bush accelerated but which began under the Clinton Administration. Geopolitics re-emerged without the illusions of ideologies to obfuscate American intentions and interests. The United States' basic priorities throughout the world, and its future relations with Russia and China, now had to be reassessed profoundly – including by the leaders of those two nuclear powers and all the major nations that had been America's allies after 1945. Its growing commitment to playing a more overtly independent role in the world, to unilateralism, was now plain for all to see, and was clearly defined in the minds of Washington's decision-makers. The world was moving, again gradually but irresistibly, toward multipolarism, a process that Bush's actions were greatly to accelerate, but which was the logical outcome of the Balkans, Israel-Palestine, and other post-Soviet crises. Above all, civil conflicts in and near Europe shattered the region's unprecedented long peace and exposed Nato's decisive limits as the Continent's only security system. Indeed, the war with Yugoslavia compelled very influential American strategic thinkers – including those who had once been ardent advocates of its Cold War missions – to conclude that it was a grave error for the United States to become entangled in third-tier issues and nations at the sacrifice of its vital relations with Japan and its former Communist enemies, its domestic responsibilities, and much else. They had finally to concede that America's impulse to intervene virtually everywhere in the world had led to an incoherent foreign policy which confronted many more challenges than it could resolve.

At the end of the twentieth century, America's image of the world and its commanding role in it, along with its core assumptions about the means and institutions it possessed for attaining its goals, were seriously confused. Neither the United Nations nor Nato offered the political or military mechanisms for it to attain its ambitions, and existing international rules and institutions were an increasingly frustrating hindrance. But no viable alternatives were emerging to replace them. Its aspirations far exceeded its capacity to achieve its ultimate objective of leading the world wherever its vast ambitions led, whether in Europe or unstable Third World regions. Washington had unprecedented military might, although the Yugoslav war again raised decisive doubts whether air power alone would suffice to subdue a determined enemy, much less if it could engage in two such relatively minor conflicts at the same time. Politics, above all, remained the Achilles heel of America's ambitions. The world, with its inordinately complex and diverse political and social realities, continued to elude it, just as it had frustrated all those powerful European nations that over preceding centuries had aspired to assume the mantle of the world's leader.

The dilemma was not only its persistent definition of global priorities that exceeded its military and political resources, but also the fact that many of the places in which the United States had intervened in the past remained continuing obligations, leaving an accumulation of troublesome legacies to potentially

challenge it in the future. Although their grave problems remained unresolved, some nations, such as Afghanistan or Haiti, appeared relatively dormant but eventually flared up again. Nearly a half-century after the Korean War ended, the United States still had 37,000 military personnel stationed there. A decade after the Gulf War, American air power and boats continued to operate in the Gulf and it will remain in Afghanistan and Iraq indefinitely, probably many decades. It became entangled in the Balkans well over a decade ago and in 2004 there were still 20,000 Nato soldiers in Kosovo, about a third of them Americans.

Its virtually uncontrollable impulse to intervene in crises in all the corners of the world, and to articulate lofty justifications for doing so, required the United States also to sacrifice those larger objectives and interests which are fundamentally more important both to itself and to world peace. The mere fact that the 1999 war in Yugoslavia alienated both Russia and China deeply, making some form of strategic alliance between them increasingly probable, meant that the re-emergence of bipolar confrontation and a return to the Cold War in another, non-ideological form – essentially the classic conflict of national interests – will also affect future international relations profoundly.

When the twentieth century ended, the United States still could not master most of the world's awesomely complex political problems. On the contrary, its attempts to do so only aggravated them. Its universal pretensions and obsessions, which began during the First World War and matured after 1945, were more dangerous than ever – both to itself and to the complex world.

War was no longer a question of conflicting states which were roughly equals, as it had been for the first four decades of the 20th century, but increasingly a matter of American interventions, whether for rational economic or simply idiosyncratic reasons. War has increasingly become synonymous with the problem of the United States, its ambitions and pretensions, its intellectual moods and its super-complex military equipment, and to solve the problem of war one had to address this presumptuous nation in all its dimensions.

Only the United States today has the will to have a global foreign policy, to believe that every part of the world was potentially important to it, and that it has both the right and the obligation to be as active as it thinks necessary everywhere. It possesses a spectrum of strategies that premise an activist role for itself, and they allow it to regulate each and every continent's fate. It believes it has the military resources or will obtain more lethal versions of it, that its economy can afford interventionism and maintain prosperity domestically, and that the American public will support whatever intervention is necessary to set the affairs of some country or region on the political and economic path it deems essential. This grandiose mission was always bipartisan and there is a fundamental consensus that the two parties share, however much they disagree – mainly for temporary election purposes – on details.

The United States did not acknowledge after Korea and Vietnam that there were decisive limits on its ambitions and strategies, and that its power was quite finite. It could not abandon its hubris, sense of destiny, or the assumption that the

answer to political complexities was simply more military equipment – to spend more money. Apart from the fact it would have been a calamity to the military-dependent industries, there was a question of an ideology and a hubris based on an overweening sense of mission that dated back to the 19th century.

What the US leaders could not internalise fully, though abstractly they conceded it might happen, was that America's global pretensions and role would make it a magnet, and that the war might come to its own shores. September 11, 2001 changed that myopia: the consequences of its foreign policies finally came home with a vengeance.

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