

## National Sovereignty & Universal Challenges: Choices for the World After Iraq

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### **“Dealing with the US After Iraq - Resist, Understand, Respond”**

- Tom Spencer, Visiting Professor of Global Governance, School of Management, University of Surrey

The sheer scale of America as ‘hyper-power’ is awesome, but the citizens of the rest of the world should also remember that it is also a superbly “hyped” power. The same folk who have brought us the doctrines of pre-emption and US pre-eminence, also perfected ‘shock and awe’ over Baghdad and the successful psych-ops that helped to demolish Saddam Hussein. Given the militarisation of American diplomacy, we may assume that the same attention to the importance of communication and ideas, the decapitation of competitive leadership and the rest will be used in the shock and awe diplomacy now practised by Washington. Divide and rule, bribe and bully, punish and reward, come from the school of thought that regards diplomacy as the extension of war by other means. Such militarisation of diplomacy, and the budgets to support it, has been building in Washington since Newt Gingrich. However it was Osama Bin Laden, one of the architects of the emerging global order, who enabled it to be realised in its current vigorous form. In the political bloodstream of Anglo Saxon states, fear breaks down into hubris. ‘Security anxiety’ is held to justify everything from the extinction of privacy to the invention of intelligence. War and the threat of war inflates the Executive at the expense of the Legislature. The Royal Perogative and its distant relative the Presidential Commander in Chief, face the world certain of where their duty lies. There are three words that the world should write in flame as it struggles to understand its current choices in dealing with untamed US power – Resist, Understand and Respond.

Particularly for Europeans, there is nothing anti-American about resisting the vigorously expressed ideas of the so called “New Reality”. Minxin Pei has pointed to the paradox of American nationalism that sees itself only as benign and value driven. From this flows both an insensitivity in understanding the rest of the world, and the stifling of internal debate in the name of patriotism. Samuel Huntington has written that “Healthy co-operation with Europe is the prime antidote for the loneliness of US super powerdom”. After Iraq however, such an option seems to have been ruled out by the Bush Administration in favour of direct competition. Three hundred years of running the planet has left many European political elites with a conviction of their superior wisdom and sophistication and an assumption that everyone is as fascinated by Europe as the Europeans. Such self-obsession renders Europeans vulnerable to American pressure. The current soul-searching about the state of EU/US relations is a case in point. The rough water in the Atlantic is not caused by anything that the Europeans initiated or any inherent defect in Atlantic institutional structures. Rather it is caused by a change in US self-perception that fundamentally alters the nature of the game. The arguments of recent months have in reality been not about Iraq, but about the exercise of global power. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Europe is understandably less important strategically to the Americans. The balance of American interest in European integration has clearly shifted, with the European Union now seen as a global competitor to America at all levels other than the military.

Europe should now expect Washington, which has two hundred years experience of setting European powers against each other, to pitch a rough game. Look for American support for a new burst of continent-wide Euro-scepticism and a particular effort to keep the British out of the Euro and paddling in mid-Atlantic. Indeed there are those in Washington for whom the best way of weakening Europe would be for the British to leave altogether. The correct response to current American 'shock and awe' diplomacy aimed at Europe should not be to repair or construct new Atlantic institutions, but to strengthen European ones. What is true for Europe is equally true for China, India, Russia and Latin America.

Understanding what has led to the change in America attitudes will be crucial to salvaging something useable from the rubble of the 'West'. Partly it is September 11<sup>th</sup>. Partly it is a story of changes in America's politics, public affairs and the nature of its democracy, of shifting regional balances and the evolution of both Democrat and Republican Parties. Such is the richness and openness of American intellectual, if not political, debate that much can be learnt from the mouths of American analysts themselves. There has been so much concentration on the much-hyped work of Robert Kagan and his 'American Strength and European Weakness', that insufficient attention has been paid to the altogether more interesting work of Charles Kupchan, published in mid-2002, under the title 'The End of the American Era'. This side-steps the usual rhetoric about unipolar versus multipolar worlds to argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union left America with a surfeit of power in its unipolar moment. This, he argues, it is squandering rather than using to construct a sympathetic multipolar environment for use when its current relative pre-eminence has declined. Such an analysis makes sense of the extraordinary aggressiveness of the US posture in recent months. The militarisation of US diplomacy and the domination of policy formation by cold-war hawks, can then be seen as nervousness about the continuation of hegemony rather than as a serene ascent to imperial status. Kupchan underlined the particular challenge for Europe in the Financial Times on 10<sup>th</sup> April "The European Union is currently in a no mans land. It is too strong to be Washington's lackey but too weak and divided to be either an effective partner or a formidable counterweight". Elsewhere he has argued that Europe will play Byzantium to America's Western Roman Empire.

For other reasons, it is high time that Europeans grew out of the Atlantic glasses, which were appropriate for 1941 or 1981, but which no longer focus accurately in the world of the twenty first century. Both Europe and America are struggling to make sense of a world in which national sovereignty, even that shared amongst twenty-five nations, is inadequate to meet the universal challenges of a century beset by environmental degradation, human rights abuse and globally co-ordinated criminal and terrorist gangs. Globalisation has ripped apart much of the comfortable scenery of traditional international relations. Europeans seek to comfort themselves by replicating their own experience at global level, while Americans have moved recently from the assertion that almost no global governance was necessary, to one in which they argue that all the key decisions should be taken in the American interest, un-softened by the transmission mechanism of multilateral institutions. Neither worldview is looking particularly healthy in the aftermath of Iraq. The current gale of American enthusiasms may blow for some years yet, but Kupchan would argue that it is in the nature of America to lose interest in foreign entanglements, even imperial ones.

The world therefore needs to be looking for responses that address underlying universal challenges rather than passing personal pique. The world outside Washington needs to critically review the effectiveness of its existing multilateral institutions from the UN to the G8 and beyond, rather than defending them instinctively against 'shock jock' criticism be it from the Senate, the Fox Channel or the 'take no prisoners' school of US think tanks. The universal challenges impact equally on both Europe and America for both have imperial pasts which integrate them into global problems. Amongst many other examples which could be cited of using brilliant Americans to light the way forward, I would point to the work of environmental historian John McNeill. His book "Something New Under the Sun" demonstrates elegantly how 'security anxiety' in the mid twentieth century directly generated major disturbances in the environment, whose consequences the whole world will have to live with for many centuries. Similarly, the work of James Kurth on 'Migration and the Dynamics of Empire' richly illustrates the way that both Europe and America are changing in demographic terms. Each becoming two nations. One secular, rich old and feeble and the other Islamic or Latino, poor, young and robust. The debate about sovereignty needs not only to be rooted not just in our past, but to be projected forward into our futures.

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