

**NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY & UNIVERSAL CHALLENGES:  
CHOICES FOR THE WORLD AFTER IRAQ**

**“SIX THEMES”**

**– AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**BY**

**ALEX EVANS**

## NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND UNIVERSAL CHALLENGES: CHOICES FOR THE WORLD AFTER IRAQ

### SIX THEMES

Over the three days of the conference, presentations and conversations ranged far and wide, from WMD to CFSP and from America to Afghanistan. Whilst more comprehensive summaries of the event are set out in the conference record, breakout sessions record and selection of speeches from the conference, this brief summary aims to provide a flavour of the event by grouping some of the contributions around six themes.

#### **What *are* the universal challenges?**

Many speakers agreed on the need for broader agreement on exactly which global challenges are most urgent. Certainly, there was no shortage of issues raised during the conference. Among the list were climate change, unsustainable resource consumption and depletion, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, the North-South divide, human rights, labour rights, international financial reform, global public health challenges such as SARS or HIV, low intensity conflict, failed or failing states, migration, technological innovations such as GM crops, biotechnology and nanotechnology, and the generalised decline in trust in institutions of all shapes and sizes. Several participants placed particular emphasis on Africa as crucial, for reasons of security as well as morality: what would be the long term implications of up to forty million AIDS orphans and a workforce eviscerated by the effects of the illness?

One trend that was perhaps discernible among participants was a tendency for Americans to emphasise hard security issues, such as terrorism or WMD, whilst Europeans tended to emphasise 'softer' issues such as sustainable development or migration. Former CIA director James Woolsey made this distinction explicit through referring to 'malignant' problems – unintended consequences of decisions, such as climate change resulting from fossil fuel consumption – versus 'malevolent' problems that were the result of an intentional decision, such as terrorism. In his view, the EU is better at dealing with the former, and the US with the latter. Tom Spencer, in dialogue with Woolsey, countered that policymakers can all too easily succumb to the temptation of prioritising the challenges that they think they can control rather than the most pressing ones. Prior to September 11, for instance, the US had focussed almost exclusively on rogue states rather than Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups.

An interesting feature of this debate was the question of whether we face many challenges, or just one. Some participants felt that there were hazards in 'over-aggregating' global issues, suggesting that the key to success was ensuring that issues were dealt with separately so as to keep them manageable. Others, though, suggested that the reality of global interdependence meant that there were increasingly 'no single issues', and that a joined up, whole system approach was essential. Such an approach would perhaps need to be both horizontally integrated across different but overlapping issue areas, and also vertically integrated through involving all levels of governance from global to local.

#### **US foreign policy after Iraq and Afghanistan**

Inevitably, much discussion about the United States began with the war on terror and the Middle East. Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan noted that the US had unfinished business in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, and observed that the Iraq Body Count campaign estimated that the civilian death toll in Iraq was at least 5,500 and possibly as high as 10,000. Both Prince Hassan and Tim Garden of King's College London suggested that post-conflict management needed improvement, especially in Iraq; Garden underlined that the US was under-resourced for this type of task, and Prince Hassan noted that 64 per cent of Iraqis saw the US as an occupying power.

Many participants surmised that the intention of the US was to recreate itself as an empire, or alternatively to be able to pursue unilateral strategies without reference to the rest of the world. Armand Clesse suggested that the US was an "autistic megalosaurus" bent on "world domination"; many others expressed similar, if less colourful, views from the floor. Tom Spencer, Executive

Director of the European Centre for Public Affairs, argued that US action in Iraq and Afghanistan failed the basic test of *effectiveness*, and that Osama bin Laden might be well pleased at what had been achieved in the wake of September 11: the Atlantic alliance had been disrupted, American troops withdrawn from Saudi Arabia, recruitment to Al Qaeda increased and the Middle East more radicalised.

Spencer also suggested that the US had a clear, logical and publicly available timetable for the disruption of multilateral institutions. Shock and awe diplomacy was being used around the world in order to maintain hegemony, he argued. This was evident in the marketing of the ideas of Robert Kagan, for example, or in the US's skilful use of European enjoyment of a carefully cultivated image of "US naivete". He argued that Donald Rumsfeld, far from being the "bumbling yokel" perceived by some Europeans, was a sophisticated political operator; and that the Bush Administration was deliberately and successfully disrupting the EU through (for example) fanning anti-French sentiment. Spencer argued that this was unacceptable, and comparable to the portrayal of Europe as anti-semitic two years ago for criticising Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories.

Such charges were, perhaps unsurprisingly, rejected by many of the Americans present. American Conservative Union Chairman David Keene questioned that if America was truly an empire, then where was the evidence of this in either 1917 or 1941. He continued that the US had long shown a tension between a desire to stand alone and a drive to engage with the world: George Washington had warned of "entangling alliances", yet Woodrow Wilson's Presidency had been all about America's perceived ability to reshape the world for the better. Former CIA Director James Woolsey was similarly dismissive of the charge of empire: if it was, why would it have withdrawn troops at Turkish or Saudi requests, and how would 'emperors' Nixon and Clinton have been impeached?

American speakers were also emphatic that the world should understand America's culture and history in order to make sense of its approach today. David Keene emphasised America's long-standing willingness to fight to protect its core values (liberty, equality of opportunity rather than outcome, individual rights and so on). Macgregor Knox of the London School of Economics added that the US had in a real sense been made by war: one in five Confederate soldiers had died in the Civil War. In today's war against terror, in which "containment is dead and deterrence irrelevant", the concept of "total war" was being dusted off to fight another day. Donald Devine of Bellevue University added that "conservative" opinion in the US was nowhere near as monolithic as some Europeans appeared to believe; moreover Donald Rumsfeld was not a "neo-conservative" but rather a conservative of a more traditional sort.

Jim Garrison, the President of the State of the World Forum, countered that the war in Iraq had very little to do with Saddam Hussein; instead the US had simply needed to "go out and clobber someone" after September 11. But at a deeper level, for Garrison, a "paradoxical antimony" lay at the heart of the United States. In one sense, it is a beacon of light and idealism. But it also has a "shadow", which becomes manifest as a result of the inevitable corruption wrought by absolute power and its imperial ambitions (dating back at least to the 1870s, according to Garrison).

However, Garrison and others also looked forward to a time in the relatively near future when America would return to its light side – perhaps as a result of passing the moment of zenith in its empire. Garrison's assertion that this zenith had already been passed was echoed by Hazel Henderson from the floor, who noted that for all the talk of hyperpower, the US had a \$400bn deficit (some 5 per cent of GDP), a zero savings rate, massive unfunded pension liabilities and Treasury Bill returns approaching zero per cent. In the longer term, the possible emergence of the euro as a second global reserve currency would only heighten pressure on the American economy.

### **Where next for the EU?**

The war on Iraq had evidently provoked a considerable degree of soul-searching among European attendees. For some attendees, Iraq exemplified in stark terms the failure of the EU to pull together a coherent common line on foreign policy issues. Armand Clesse, the director of the Luxembourg Institute for European and International Studies, argued that the Iraq had showed the "fundamental spinelessness" of the EU, which was a "faceless, volatile, frail, hapless political eunuch".

For others, though – including, interestingly, many voices from the other side of the Atlantic – the EU had much to be proud of. From initially being considered a “madman’s dream” (as Georges Berthoin wryly observed), it had according to International Herald Tribune CEO Peter Goldmark “the most daring adventure in human co-operation anywhere in the world”, and the “new moral centre of gravity” in the world. Canadian Ambassador to the EU Jeremy Kinsman noted that whilst the tide of idealism that had marked the founding of the EU had abated in recent years, it might return with the arrival of the new entrant countries to the East.

At any rate, there seemed to be a clear consensus among many leading Brussels policymakers (notably European Parliament President Pat Cox and Pierre Defraigne of DG Trade) that the EU could and should improve its military capacity. Cox, Defraigne and Sir Tim Garden (a former Air Marshal now at King’s College London) emphasised that although the EU spends less than half the proportion of GNP on military expenditure spent by the US, it gets just a tenth of the benefit. There was considerable scope for improving economies of scale between member states on areas such as heavy lift capacity. Cox went further, to observe that the EU should avoid a position in which the US leads military interventions and the EU follows in only when the fighting has ceased (or, as he put it, where “one cooks and the other cleans up”).

This still left open the question of exactly how Europe should relate to the United States at this crucial juncture. Cox won the prize for pithiness, suggesting that the EU should “avoid confusing alliance with allegiance”. David Calleo, a Professor at Johns Hopkins University, argued that the EU needs to be able to stand on its own, particularly in military terms – not as a competitor to the US, but based on a realisation that any successful partnership must be based on a balance of power if resentment on both sides is to be averted.

### **Whither the state? - Sovereignty in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The question of national sovereignty sat at the heart of most, if not all, conversations at the conference. Gareth Evans, President of the International Crisis Group, noted that the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia system of sovereignty had de facto been eroded by a host of factors, from moral limits on states’ limits of action to the increasing significance of actors at both supranational and sub-national level and the increasing interconnectedness wrought by globalisation. Sovereignty is now being reasserted, he continued – above all by the United States. Yet today’s world is one in which borders have become an increasingly abstract concept. Neither people, goods nor capital are limited by borders; problems often affect many states simultaneously; and many problems are beyond the capacity of single states to solve.

Of particular importance, according to both Evans and Georges Berthoin, was the need to reconceptualise the idea of “the national interest”. As Evans observed, co-operation tends to breed more co-operation; this principle of reciprocity has been a basic principle of human relationships throughout history, but as yet has not been applied very successfully to international relations.

Donald Devine of Bellevue University countered that the Westphalian system had not been particularly successful in attaining its stated goal of peace and stability. With regard to the present day, he argued that international organisations are simply unable to govern other states: treaty regimes do not function well, and powerful states that do not wish to join treaties cannot be compelled to do so.

Former Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy argued that security has now transcended the nation-state and become an individual concern: innocent civilians can be targeted precisely *because* they are innocent. As a result, sovereignty could now be re-interpreted as the ability of a state to protect its citizens; when a state will not or cannot do so, then intervention (or abrogation of sovereignty) is justified. This is particularly acute in the case of failed states, which can all too easily become breeding grounds for terrorism.

American Conservative Union Chairman David Keene noted perceptively that some participants appeared unsure whether sovereignty was ‘a good thing’ or not. In the context of climate change, for instance, some participants felt that national sovereignty was an obstacle in the way of collective action; yet some of the same participants were also implicitly arguing *in favour* of sovereignty by

suggesting that Iraq had been violated through being invaded by the US without an authorising Security Council resolution.

### **UN reform and global governance**

Many contributors expressed their belief in the need for either reform of the UN system or new global governance frameworks that could complement existing institutions and processes. Gareth Evans spoke at length about the current global governance system, agreeing that it was inadequate and incomplete.

There was general agreement that the UN system needs reform to make it less bureaucratic and more meritocratic, responsive and transparent. Other proposals included an expansion of ECOSOC to include civil society and business, and new 'world taxes' to allow expenditure on global issues (for example on oil production, arms exports or intercontinental transportation). Georges Berthoin also proposed that the UN Secretary General should have the power to make proposals in the common interest, similarly to the European Commission's ability to propose new policy.

The need for representation at global level was returned to time and again. One idea that found support was the 'e-Parliament' to draw together national elected representatives through a global databases and virtual ad-hoc issue groups. Others suggested the need for the UN to include a formal Parliamentary Assembly. Some participants noted a possible trade-off between democracy and participation on the one hand, and effectiveness and speed of response on the other.

Jean-François Rischard, European VP for the World Bank, suggested that new institutions were the last thing the world needed in order to address global challenges; and whilst a world government might be an appealing idea, it was politically unfeasible. Instead, he suggested new 'Global Issue Networks': ad hoc groupings convened by international organisations to address a specific concern, which would first produce norms on the issue, and then implement these norms through increasing the breadth of participation in the Networks over time.

### **Paradigms and values**

One of the most interesting features of the conference was that conversation was by no means limited to institutions, processes, policies and risks. Questions of worldview were also very much at the forefront of discussion: both of values, and also, more fundamentally, about paradigms and basic assumptions about the world.

Reginald Dale, editor of European Affairs, argued that a central issue in Atlantic relations was a straightforward difference in values between the EU and the US, for example over the death penalty or Guantanamo Bay. Despite this, however, both EU and US did have overlapping *interests*: in a stable, peaceful world, for instance, with liberal trade, investment and energy flows, and without terrorism, crime, environmental degradation or disease.

Attitudes to global governance may also be dictated largely by values. Reginald Dale suggested that fear of global institutions in the US may be driven partly by an Anglo-Saxon suspicion of utopias; David Keene made a similar point in arguing that the US wants to be liked, but also wants to be left alone.

Yet as Mervat Badawi, the director of Kuwait's Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development observed, perhaps there are global values after all: the Koran and the Old and New Testament are 95 per cent syncretic. One might take this allusion further and note that *all* of the world's major religions are based in large part on the same core, which Leibniz termed the *philosophia perennis*. Juan de Costa offered a view that *all* ethical values – whether capitalist, anarchist or something else again – had something of value to offer. If Israelis could admire Palestinians for the integrity of their values, and vice versa, then perhaps we could really lay claim to having made a degree of moral progress.