

US *Macht-politik* in Eurasia and the Re-fashioning of the Greater Middle East

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This article is an attempt to interpret US strategy in Europe-Asia and in its key strategic sub-region, the Middle East. It locates US strategy in a post-Cold War analytical framework, trying to diagnose the deeper reasons that have led and are leading the US to thrust forward power across the globe the way it does. The fundamental argument we will try to establish is that US *macht-politik* has shifted from a balance-of-power game that prevailed during the Cold War into an overt projection of overwhelming force, disregarding the posture of core Western allies of the US, such as France and Germany. From this perspective, I place the realist/neo-realist concept of 'balance-of-power' in the framework of relations between the great powers of the West (France, Germany, Britain) and the emerging great powers of the East (Russia, China, India), thus moving the notion away from its Cold War realist/neo-realist usage, applied to the bi-polar system centered on the USSR-US dichotomy.

Thus, the article argues that the Iraqi crisis has set the tone for a remarkable shift within the global power settings that have tended to prevail in Eurasia after the fall of the Berlin Wall. These settings, now in shatters, began to be formed on a consensual balance-of-power game between all post-Cold War Eurasian-European powers and the US-UK axis, under the leadership of the latter. The Clinton administration was very successful in forming this consensual balance-of-power in Europe-Asia in the 1990s, but the new conservative government in the US under Bush Jr. seems to have been destroying this consensus with its

Iraqi drive and the way it handled world politics in the aftermath of September 11. But it may not be an issue of 'bad crisis management' only. In the event, the Iraqi crisis may well herald a radical change in the entire framework of contemporary international relations, establishing a new paradigm of policy conduct. The article attempts to describe this newly-emerging paradigm as *cosmopolitan absolutism*.

My analyses also discuss in detail US strategy in the greater Middle East, arguing that this strategy aims at the transformation of the entire region, with the purpose of putting under US monetary (the competition between the Dollar and the Euro) and security control the new geopolitics and geo-economics of oil and gas resources in the whole of Eurasia. In this context, I maintain that the enemies of the US are not mainly terrorist 'think-tanks' or networks of the sort of Al-Qaeda. Rather, the main threat for the US comes from *state actors* and *regimes* that do not comply with its hegemonic policies for global domination, and also come from core Eurasian allies or powers, such as Germany, France, Russia and China. Thus, I shed light on the notions of 'regime change' and 'pre-emptive strike', trying to integrate them into an analysis of the changing nature of the international relations system that has tended to prevail after the Cold War, and which seems to be giving way to America's *cosmopolitan absolutism*.

International Relations Since 1989: A Bird's Eye View

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought into being new political and economic agents in the immediate periphery of Russia and China. Anti-Russian nationalism, often encouraged and supported by the US, has been an important vehicle for the break-up of the Soviet-led Empire.¹ The scramble for Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia began, amidst a strategic uncertainty in the global environment. It was an uncertainty that did not last long.

The Gulf War of 1990-91 made it clear to the rest of the world that the US is becoming an unchallenged global hegemon, determined to project power in crucial strategic zones in order to thwart possible competitive designs aiming at regional or global hegemony. In parallel with this, US global economic statecraft and free trade policies were promoted via the transformation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1994, whereas the ‘shock therapy’ theory spearheaded by Harvard University Professor, Jeffrey Sachs, provided for the ‘reconstruction-transformation’ of the domestic environments of East-Central Europe and the Balkans.² In the main, these policies designated the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank as key instruments dictating neo-liberal economic reforms to the former Communist states, often without taking into account their specific economic realities of transition from command into free market economies.³

US global economic statecraft was strictly linked with US-UK neo-conservative domestic economic strategy as applied by the administrations of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s: privatisations, liberalisation of financial and security markets, labour flexibility and further subsumption of labour into capital, constant technological innovation in production and services, particularly in information industries and telecommunications. The ‘economic boom’ of the Anglosaxon world in the 1990s was nevertheless other than sustainable.⁴ It was a speculative boom on the stock market via a huge growth in private indebtedness and huge volumes of US international debts and trade deficits. Consequently, the US Treasury projected not a solid growth strategy, but a nonchalant economic bubble ready to burst with the first recession, witness the crisis of the Asian ‘tiger’ economies in 1997, the Russian financial collapse in summer 1998, or the present recession in the US, which emerged in parallel with corruption scandals in corporate business and finance.

On the political-military front, post-Cold War NATO, under the hegemonic drive of the US, expanded eastwards twice, gradually transforming itself from a *defence pact* into a *political organisation* in order to buttress US state objectives in Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East.⁵ However, the US was careful not to alienate Russia too much. It launched the Partnership for Peace (PfP) process in 1993 and a joint NATO-Russia Council was established in the May 2002 agreements providing for both sides, among other things, to cut their nuclear warheads by two-thirds, to 1,700-2,000, over the next ten years. This move aimed at creating a ‘duopoly’ image between the US and Russia in Eurasia, ‘squeezing out’ the EU and China, particularly in the field of energy business.⁶ But this game did not last long due to the significant re-alignments that occurred over the Iraqi crisis: France, Germany, Russia and China stood up against the US-UK bloc.

Admittedly, the EU could not have stayed out of the post-Cold war race. The EU boosted its economic integration and the Euro, the Dollar’s main competitor in the global money markets, was launched in 1999. In addition, the EU’s ‘big-bang’ eastward enlargement was confirmed last December in Copenhagen. The EU is an economic giant, with a larger population and gross domestic product than the US, and is the principal provider of foreign direct investment, both as a host economy and as a source economy.⁷ Moreover, the EU, has since 1990 launched a robust energy policy, expanding its cooperative networks and projects in East-Central Europe and the Balkans, aiming at counter-balancing the US. But the EU lacks a federal and cohesive political structure, something which makes it very difficult to present itself as an independent political actor, with one voice, on the world stage. Thus, the first serious blow to its ‘big-bang’ enlargement did not take long to come: most of the newcomers, including Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, endorsed the US’s policy over Iraq, making it clear who is in real charge of the EU’s expansion process.⁸ Meanwhile, the US was quick to put forward – although it needs further elaboration on its behalf – the new ‘deter

forward' concept for NATO, according to which NATO bases, personnel and intelligence gathering facilities would have to move closer to the Eastern theatres of conflict. In this context, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, assisted by Greece and Turkey, would have to play a prominent role as 'forward bases', 'staging areas' and 'back-up defence zones'. This arrangement would allow US-led NATO to 'replace France with Russia', as Thomas L. Friedman put it, thus moving its operational areas to Central Asia and the Middle East. The old NATO, Friedman said, 'patrolled the German-Soviet frontier. This one will be patrolling Kambul and Baghdad'.⁹

In a way, however, both NATO and the EU appear to be victims of this dual eastward enlargement, of this rampant geo-strategic race for influence and power over key Eurasian regions, which are either rich in oil and gas (e.g. the Middle Eastern States, the Caspian Sea area), or constitute important transport routes (e.g. the Balkans). Ultimately, the worrying cracks in the collective security system established in the wake of the Second World War are being echoed in the UN and its Security Council. With its credentials having already been damaged, particularly during the Kosovo crisis in 1998-9, this fundamental international organisation may well fall into abeyance, following the fate of the League of Nations during the inter-war period. NATO's campaign against Yugoslavia in March-June 1999 lacked a UN Security Council authorisation, and so did the US-UK war against Iraq. But there are several qualitative differences between the Kosovo situation and the Iraqi case.

In the first place, the opposition to war against Yugoslavia remained within the institutional bounds of both NATO and the EU, without ever assuming an explicitly overt political form. Then the Clinton administration was careful to mount its campaign within the framework of a humanitarian discourse, something which did receive the appreciation of a sensitive European public opinion. But the strategy 'orchestrated by Cheney and Rumsfeld is a far more strident, if also brittle, rallying-cry than the cloying pieties of the Clinton-Albright

years'.¹⁰ It is a strategy that, at least as far as appearances are concerned, attributes primacy to *force/coercion* rather than to *consent* in the conduct of US foreign policy. Thus, soon after the end of military operations in Kosovo, the US was quick to go back to the UN Security Council to help draft a resolution accomodating all interested parties, including Serbia, China and Russia. This may not happen in the aftermath of the Iraqi crisis, not least because of the sharp and open divisions within NATO, the EU and the UN Security Council. But there is also something else, surely of greater importance, which should not go unnoticed.

The illegal war over Kosovo was not launched in order to change Yugoslavia's regime, although this was an implicit aim of NATO, as can be seen from a careful reading of the famous 'Appendix B' of the Rambouillet text, which the Serbs rejected out-of-hand.¹¹ Strictly speaking, Milosevic was not overthrown by the US-led NATO, but by the people of Serbia. The war over Iraq, which was also illegal, aimed nevertheless at a *regime change*, and this constitutes a huge qualitative difference in the understanding not only of US strategy, but also in the analysis and interpretation of contemporary international relations systems. Another qualitative difference is the implementation of the concept of *pre-emptive strike* upon states and regimes that the US considers as threats, either because they harbour terrorists, or because they appear to possess Weapons of Mass destruction (WMD). It is a concept that was enshrined in the Presidential NSC (National Security Council) document *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, drafted in September 2002.¹² Seen from this angle, the aftermath of the Iraqi war may herald a radical change in the world system, that is to say, world politics may never re-balance their legitimate political structures, institutions and policy projection along its post-war and post-Cold War security pillars: NATO, the European Communities and the UN.

On the fringes of all this, but by no means less important, stand supreme the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Kurdish question. The former remains as bloody and ferocious as

ever, with the US explicitly supporting the Israelis, infuriating both the Europeans and the Arab-Muslim world. The latter represents another modern drama at the heart of the Middle East: the Kurds, who have fought for their independence since at least the final eclipse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922-23, are the largest modern, secular nation in Eurasia deprived of a state. Arguably, the vast Eurasian continent, host of millions of refugees, immigrants and displaced persons, has not become a better place since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

A Framework for Analysis

A careful reading of the strategies that key global state actors, or groups of states, pursued after the end of the Cold War, shows that their imperatives were guided neither by moral reasoning nor by international law and established institutional norms.

The NATO-US war over Kosovo was primarily a preventive war to resuscitate and expand NATO, and to establish US security interests in the wider Balkan and Black Sea zones, putting a check on Germany's and Russia's influence there. France's withdrawal from the US-led no-fly zones arrangement in Iraq on the grounds that it was illegal, was not merely in defiance of US-UK conduct of policy. It was also a sharp reminder of the extent to which France is interested in the Levant, the greater Middle East and the French oil companies and interests operating there. The EU launched its TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States), TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) and INOGATE (Inter-State Oil and Gas Transport to Europe) programmes with the explicit aim of assisting the construction of new pipeline networks, or the renovation of new ones, in the zone stretching from the Caspian and the Black Sea regions to Western Europe.¹³ The continuing war between the Russians and the Chechens is not only, and simply, over territory and ethnic pride. It is also because of oil and gas pipelines, new and old, that pass, or are planned to pass, through contested territorial zones. China, whose requirement of imported crude is increasing, has attempted to build, together with Japan, a strategic pipeline

of 4,200km transporting Azeri oil to its regions, client states and Japan. The list of energy-related interests and conflicts in Eurasia and its key sub-region, the Middle East, is endless.

States have objectives and interests. When exercising foreign policy and coercive diplomacy, states such as France, China, Britain and Russia pay little attention to law and human rights, because they are states with a credible military power projection and deterrence. It is usually the small and less powerful actors that tend to subscribe to the letter of international law. Yet when it comes to confronting the US, even the aforementioned states seem to be brushing aside their power-politics posture: at convenience – depending on the circumstances – they either jump onto the American bandwagon, or hide themselves behind international law and normative stances.

This is why Iraq-related events are of crucial importance: four core Eurasian ‘continental’ powers, France, Germany, Russia and China are against two ‘oceanic’ powers, the US and the UK. This confrontation, which is not new at all, matters. It is the first time since the Suez crisis of the 1950s that the West is so bitterly and openly divided. Yet it came to the surface as dramatically as it did, because what is at stake today, among others, is the re-fashioning of the entire geo-political and geo-strategic architecture of the greater Middle East, and not Iraq’s regime change or oil reserves alone.

Let us first depict the main features of the current situation in the arc stretching from the shores of the Balkan Black Sea, down to the Middle East and Central Asia – what I would call ‘greater Middle East’. Our purpose is to decipher the complicated reasons that lie behind the US policy of ‘regime change’ and ‘pre-emptive action’ in Iraq.

Eurasia as a whole accounts for 75 per cent of the world’s population, 60 per cent of its gross national product and 75 per cent of its energy resources. Moreover, 63 per cent of the world’s proven oil reserves are in the Middle East and 25 per cent (or 261 billion barrels) in Saudi Arabia alone.¹⁴ Thus, understandably enough, nearly every international policy act

of the US after the end of the Cold War has been subordinated to the following paramount objective: how to hold sway over Eurasia and its Middle Eastern sub-region, that is to say, how to create such conditions so as to dominate the ensemble of powers located in Eurasia. One of the fundamental preconditions for this strategy to be successful is to prevent OPEC states from converting their reserves from Dollars to Euros.¹⁵ Russia, EU states such as Germany and France, and China figure here prominently as counter-powers, but this US overall strategic imperative is far more complicated when it breaks down to the intermediate objectives that have been pursued for the accomplishment of this goal.

In the first place, the strategic partnership with the EU would have to be reinforced and Britain should permanently engage the EU in a direction that prevents the formation of a 'fortress Europe', that is a federal and politically coherent EU, managing a truly sovereign currency in the global market. Similarly, Russia has to be constantly engaged through NATO and the EU, and Turkey, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine would have to assume the strategic role of 'front-line' states – in fact Turkey has been playing this 'front-line' role for some time now.¹⁶ In this context, the establishment of US power in Central Asia after September 11 serves two strategic purposes for the US: first, the 'oval' surveillance of Russia and China and, second, the security of the transportation of oil and gas to Western markets at stable prices denominated in Dollars. As far as the Middle East is concerned, the situation was, until recently, under control: Saudi Arabia, one of the largest producers of oil in the world and first in oil reserves, has been cooperating with the US, and the US has built an enormous power presence there and in the Gulf region after 1990-91. However, the more we enter the 'area of detail', the more complicated the whole picture becomes.

Most Middle Eastern and Central Asian elites, including pivotal states such as Turkey, Jordan and Pakistan, are under enormous pressure from their publics, which refuse to endorse their pro-American stance. Then there are disobedient actors, the so-called 'rogue states' (e.g.

Syria, Iran, Libya), whereas the Israeli-Palestinian conflict impairs all efforts towards the establishment of a permanent understanding between the US and the Islamic world. Moreover, regional disputes or conflicts over territory and energy or water resources (e.g. Chechnya-Russia, Armenia-Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabach, Georgia-Russia over Abkhazia, Turkey-Syria over the Euphrates and the Hatay province) would also have to be tuned to American interests. Most interestingly, in 2000, some OPEC countries including Iraq, Iran and Venezuela, began pushing for the denomination of their petroleum trade in Euros. As Bulent Gokay observed, the complete unfolding of such a development, would have been disastrous for the American attempts at monetary management: 'Interest rates would have to rise to match or exceed those offered by the Euro. But America is in a recession out of which it sees no way. One crucial tool of monetary management, to be able to lower interest rates with no fear of the flight of overseas capital, would be blunted'.¹⁷

Let us now touch upon the Kurdish issue. It deserves to be examined at some length, due to its relevance to the Iraqi crisis.

The Kurds, who have lived at the heart of Messopotamia since ancient times and number some 25 million, are the largest modern nation in Eurasia without a state. But they live mainly in four-five other established Middle Eastern states (Turkey, Syria, Iran, Armenia and Iraq) and any attempt at creating a united greater Kurdistan would entail revision of borders. Thus, the US cannot ignore the Kurdish issue in dealing with 'regime change' in Iraq and it has to seek to accommodate both the request for autonomy for the Kurds in Northern Iraq and Turkey's security interests in the post-Saddam region. Time and again, though, the dispute is not over territory and safety of territorial borders alone. Both the Kurds and the Turks covet the oil-rich fields of Mosul and Kirkuk, as well as the vital Iraqi-Turkish pipeline: if they come under the possession of the Kurds, then financing the foundation of a Kurdish micro-state out of energy revenues is a likely outcome; if they come under the

control of Turkey, then the country's economy would receive a remarkable boost, while preventing the emergence of a Kurdish state entity.¹⁸ But both scenarios were considered by the US-UK axis as unwanted developments during the stand-off over Iraq. In effect, what the US wanted to achieve through a complex game of diplomacy and coercion was the accommodation of interests of both actors in a post-Saddam region under its hegemonic guidance. It has proved very difficult. The Kurds feared that the US would allow Turkey to enter the Kurdish zone in Northern Iraq, occupy the oil-fields and deprive them of any form of administrative or federal autonomy in a post-Saddam Iraq.¹⁹ The Turks wished to secure both the IMF hand-outs and their army's presence in Iraqi Kurdistan, something of which the US-UK disapproved, as it was likely to create a permanent zone of tension and instability.²⁰ In essence, both actors, Kurds and Turks, were reluctant to fully embrace US policy on the issue, until after the situation was stabilised and the clash of interests settled. Over the past fifteen years, Turkish armed forces have repeatedly crossed the mountainous Turkish-Iraqi border, on the pretext of pursuing Turkish PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party) guerillas.²¹

Last but not least, there is the Iranian factor to be considered: if any form of condominium over Northern Iraq's resources is envisaged by the US, then Iran may well demand its share. The alternative for Iran would be to stand idly by, overtaken by the unfolding of a series of negative developments for its territorial cohesion. We know that this has not been Iran's choice in the past, even if its policy has witnessed remarkable shifts, from supporting the Iraqi Kurds in the 1970s and 1980s due to tension and war with Iraq, to launching a series of attacks against them in the 1990s along the Iraqi-Iranian border in concert with Saddam. Iran also wants to avoid establishing any precedent towards independent statehood for the Kurds, as there is a large Azeri minority in its borders with Azerbaijan, a minority "which constitutes a majority in several Northern Iranian provinces."²² Tiny Azerbaijan, which has been defeated by Armenia's Russian- equipped army, may

nevertheless become an important and oil-rich regional player, capable of inciting nationalistic movements outside its territory.

This is why the US's Iraqi gamble is so precarious for both US regional interests and the security of crucial Middle Eastern actors. By extension, I would argue that this gamble puts in jeopardy the security of Europe and the world.

The Iraqi Gamble

Many analysts dealing with states or regions which happen to be rife with ethnic and religious conflicts, tend to attribute primacy to the domestic ethnic, governmental or religious actors in explaining a regime's crisis. Such have been, for example, some of the interpretations of the Cyprus issue or the break-up of Yugoslavia.²³ Iraq has been dealt with in a similar manner by several scholars: as an oppressive dictatorial regime ruled by its Sunni minority (some 26 per cent of the total population) under the clique of Saddam Hussein, a minority concentrated in the middle of the country, the suppressed groups being the Kurds in the North and the majority Shi'i Muslims (54 per cent) in the South.²⁴

This analytical angle has been extremely useful, and merits attention, in the analysis of societal conflict, national identity, governmental structures and foreign policy formulation. It has also been very informative in showing the appalling domestic policies pursued by regimes such as that of Milosevic in Yugoslavia and Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Yet these analyses often fail to articulate the importance of domestic factors with the determining presence of exogenous actors, which not only tend to perpetuate domestic conflict, but also interfere with specific agendas, trying to tailor and re-model domestic environments on the basis of their own state and social-structural interests. For instance, Iran has helped the Iraqi Shi'is several times so as to achieve specific national objectives at the expense of the Ba'athist regime of Saddam. From this perspective, what is crucial in explaining ethnic and religious conflict or, for that matter, dictatorial policies, is the strategy pursued by powerful

external forces. Then we should seek to analyse and understand the ways in which these external forces are articulated with domestic agents. It is insufficient to explain such complicated matters by simply referring to the fractured projection of domestic actors upon the regime in question, and vice versa. This methodological standpoint, first and foremost, drives us to look closely at US policy towards Iraq and the role of other Western interests operating in the region.

Iraq has been portrayed by the Bush Jr. administration as a 'rogue state' in possession of WMD, a state which is governed by a brutal dictator. It belongs, together with other 'pariah states', such as North Korea, to his 'axis of evil'. But it also happens to be in the middle of two other 'rogue states', Syria and Iran, and to have the second largest oil reserves in the world. Iraq, unlike North Korea, does not have a credible military deterrence and its regime has been weakened by the imposition of over ten years of economic sanctions and by tensions caused between Saddam's ruling Sunni's, the Kurds and the Shi'is. Militarily speaking, the imposition of the Northern and Southern no-fly zones has further weakened the political-institutional framework of the Iraqi state, making it extremely vulnerable to any attack from an outside power.

As we saw earlier, Iraq has attempted to switch its oil trade from Dollars to Euros. Moreover, due to deteriorating equipment and the UN embargo, its oil fields are badly under-utilised. The 'modernisation work' and the exploitation of the oil-wells have been mainly assigned to French, Russian and Chinese companies. Although American and British companies are key players in other parts of the Middle East, the Caspian Sea area, the Caucasus and the Balkans, they are absent from Iraq. It was rightly thought that a pro-US/UK post-Saddam regime in Iraq would therefore not finalise the agreements signed with the Iraqi government in the 1990s. In fact, the new government, being installed by the victorious US-UK coalition, tends to favour US and UK interests. This, in turn, decreases the dependence of

the US-UK economies on Saudi and OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) oil, giving them more freedom of economic and political action, both in the region and globally. I would therefore argue that this is one set of reasons that contributed to the shaping of the two opposing international blocs over Iraq.

A second set – strictly interlinked with the first, but perhaps more important – has to do with what President Bush Jr., in his speech to the American Enterprise Institute on 26 February 2003, called ‘the transformation of the Middle East’. This transformation has to pass through Baghdad, as ‘a new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region’.²⁵ This calculus is very serious. It means that the ‘new guidelines’ of the White House and of the Pentagon are designed to deal first with the ‘rogue’ and dictatorial regimes of the Middle East, and then consider giving the Palestinians some form of state, or as an advocate of this strategy put it:

It is worth remembering that Saddam’s Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 came on the heels of the first Palestinian intifada, which also provoked much Arab hostility toward the United States. It was Saddam’s defeat that cleared a space for the Madrid Conference and eventually the Oslo peace process. Then as now, defeating Saddam would offer the United States a golden opportunity to show the Arab and Muslim worlds that Arab aspirations are best achieved by working in cooperation with Washington. If an American road to a calmer situation in Palestine does in fact exist, it runs through Baghdad (...). [But] those who say that [the Arab-Israeli conflict] should be tackled before or instead of Iraq and Al-Qaeda have their strategic priorities backward.²⁶

There is no official talk about a Kurdish state, but it is clear that this notion of ‘transformation of the Middle East’ has led the Turks – similarly as in the past but on a much wider scale due to the critical character of the situation and the determination of the

Americans – to review their emergency plans to counter the possibility of the emergence of a Kurdish state, or proto-state, in the wake of the fall of Saddam.

Admittedly, this set of ‘guidelines’ seem to sidestep those drafted and pursued by the Clinton administration, albeit reluctantly: apparently, Clinton’s strategy aimed at settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – witness the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995 – and, operating through the UN and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), to assist the Kurds to administer a safe area for them in Northern Iraq. Despite facing fierce opposition from conservative policy advocates, the ‘transformation of the greater Middle East’ was seen by Clinton’s team as an aftermath, rather than a pre-requisite of these two international consensus processes. It was a doctrine that enjoyed the advantage of making feasible a peaceful imposition of US hegemonic interests upon the dictatorial states of the region, as they would have been deprived of any political and ideological instrument drawn from the dire situation of the Palestinians and the Kurds. But the new administration under Bush Jr., has openly chosen the path of coercive diplomacy, ‘pre-emptive strikes’ and aggression with a view to alter the relationship of forces in the Middle East by moving from a ‘balance-of-power’ regional and global hegemonic game into an overt projection of power, slapping in the face key EU states (France and Germany), Russia and China. This qualitative strategic leap, which the US sees as an aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, may nevertheless proliferate wars, conflicts and terrorism across the region and the globe, instead of containing them. But I would also argue that it is this qualitative change in the strategy of the US that has undermined the national and class interests of all other major Eurasian powers, making it impossible for them, at least at present, to jump onto the American bandwagon as they did in other cases (e.g. the 1990-91 Gulf War, Yugoslavia). *What can be called America’s ‘cosmopolitan absolutism’ is a shift from a balance-of-power realist/neo-realist paradigm based on an alternate usage of coercion and consent within the Western*

alliance core, into an authoritarian projection of force disregarding balance-of power mechanisms and consensus processes within that core.

Ultimately, this determined American drive of *cosmopolitan absolutism* that undermines the very core of the Western alliance system of the US itself, is generated by both domestic and external exigencies of the structure of the US polity. Peter Gowan has put it as follows:

The commanding vision of the architects of the American century, from Elihu Root through Stimson and Acheson to the Rockefellers, who believed America's surplus capital could transform and knit the world together, risks turning into something approaching its opposite: a US economy requiring manipulation of global monetary and financial, as well as political, relationships to suck in capital to sustain its domestic consumer booms and speculative bubbles. An American military statecraft and geopolitics geared increasingly to sustaining international socio-economic relationships that serve too exclusively US domestic interests could eventually generate acute tensions at the heart of the new global order.²⁷

In a way, the new type of systematisation of hegemonic policies pursued by the new Bush administration is almost entirely endorsed by the conservative government of Ariel Sharon in Israel. At the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations in February 2003, Shaul Mofaz, the Israeli Defence Minister, said that 'after Iraq, the US should generate political, economic and diplomatic pressure on Iran'. He also added that 'Israel regards Iran and Syria as greater threats and it is hoping that once Saddam is dispensed with, the dominoes will start to tumble'.²⁸ It seems that for Israel, as for the US, Iraq was already a spent case. The point at issue was who to deal with next, and how to make the diplomatic or military case for it successfully.

The Question of Terrorism and America's Geo-Strategic Imperatives in Eurasia

My analysis so far suggests that the post-September 11 strategy of the US has not been guided by the imperative of the extermination of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network, nor by the need to remove Saddam Hussein from power, because he may use WMD against Israel and other US interests in the Middle East.²⁹ Rather, the aim of the campaign in Afghanistan and/or of any future US-UK campaign in the greater Middle East, has been/will be based on pre-existing policy schemes aimed at the entire transformation of the greater Middle East and Eastern Europe, leading to the strategic bracketing of Russia and China, the control over oil and gas pipeline projects, and the opening up of the Middle East energy market to Western competition. At the heart of this US strategy is preserving the subordination of the Euro against the Dollar in global currency and monetary markets, a policy that serves both domestic and external needs of US financial and capital interests.

'A few days before September 11', Bulent Gokay observed, 'the US Energy Information Administration documented Afghanistan's strategic geographical position as a potential transit route for oil and natural gas exports from Central Asia to the Arabian Sea'.³⁰ During the campaign in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkmenistan discussed 'the development of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan to the port of Gwadar, now being built with Chinese assistance on the Baluchistan coast'.³¹ There have always been fears on the part of the US that a special axis based on energy, trade and financial interests may develop between the EU, Russia and China. This axis, in turn, would lay the ground for a geo-political understanding between them, thus damaging the potential hegemonic posture of the US in the whole of Eurasia and its crucial sub-regions (the Middle East and the Caspian and Black Sea zones). This new geopolitics and geo-economics of gas and oil that opened-up in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union constitutes a key factor for the US in the consideration, formulation and conduct of its new hegemonic policy of *cosmopolitan absolutism* in Eurasia.

Terrorism, real or fictitious, is not the essential strategic enemy of the US. It has never been so, nor it is today, even after the tragic events of September 11. States, particularly states like the US and the UK, do not conduct international policies on the basis of exterminating ‘terrorist think-tanks’ or ‘networks of terror’, although this concept can become a substantial element of domestic or global policing in the service of their economic, ideological and political strategies of domination. After all, and as the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has clearly shown, individual terrorism cannot be dealt with adequately through state policing and state military methods. The reason is simple: someone who is determined to kill him/herself can kill anybody in any place and at any moment. US new hegemonic policies run therefore the risk of producing, both globally and regionally, more terrorism and terrorists than those already existing. Having said this, I would remove from the picture the threat of terrorism, however real, to argue that the US’s notions of ‘pre-emptive strikes’ and ‘regime change’ is guided neither by the need to exterminate terrorism, nor to secure American lives at home and abroad. Rather, it is guided by a set of broad geostrategic imperatives in Eurasia, which are as follows:

- a. The military bracketing of Russia and China in order to obtain their subordinate co-operation.
- b. The continuation of the strategic partnership with key EU states, such as France and Germany, while preventing the emergence of a federal Europe, politically united and cohesive, managing a sovereign currency in money markets.
- c. The prevention of the formation of an alternative powerful coalition in Eurasia, that would be capable of challenging the supremacy of the US.

Concluding Remarks: Towards a New Paradigm in International Relations?

Admittedly, the second and the third set of US objectives outlined above have been shaken and undermined in their entirety due to the present impasse over the Iraqi crisis. This

crisis matters a lot, because Iraq's fall heralds the general transformation of the greater Middle East, 'legitimising' US power projection via 'pre-emptive strikes' and in order to achieve 'regime change', without the agreement of the UN, that is to say, without taking into account the national and class interests of other Eurasian powers, trying to accommodate them through consensus processes. The fall of Iraq to US-UK interests means, first and foremost, an endorsement of the way in which the US led this policy shift in the terrain of post-Cold War international relations from a balance-of-power game into an overwhelming display and projection of power against whatever enemy it considers a threat. This is – as Perry Anderson would put it, drawing from the work of Antonio Gramsci – a blunt exercise of hegemony through *force*, rather than *consent*.³² Joseph Nye, in his attempt to elaborate further on this dichotomy, argued:

Command power can rest on inducements ('carrots') or threats ('sticks'). But there is also an indirect way to exercise power. A country may achieve the outcomes it prefers in world politics because other countries want to follow it or have agreed to a system that produces such effects. In this sense, it is just as important to set the agenda and structure the situations in world politics as it is to get others to change in particular situations. This aspect of power – that is getting others to do what you want – might be called *indirect* or *co-optive* power behaviour (my emphasis). It is in contrast to the active command power behaviour [what Nye calls 'carrots' (consent) and 'sticks' (force): my comment] of getting others to do what you want.³³

Although for Nye the concept of 'command power' seems to be an all-inclusive notion, inculcating both 'force' and 'consent', it is clear that there is a certain overlapping of functions between 'consent' and what he calls 'indirect or co-optive power behaviour'. The set of reasons that led France, Germany, Russia and China to oppose the US gamble over Iraq has precisely to do both with the *mode of conduct* (the notion of 'pre-emptive strike') of US

policies and the *actual content* (the notion of ‘regime change’) of those policies, which failed to accommodate their class and national interests. These elements have enabled us to put forward the concept of *cosmopolitan absolutism*, a concept that applies to the international policy behaviour of the US in the management of relations with its core Western allies and Eurasian actors. Admittedly, it is a concept that needs further analytical elaboration and reflection. For instance, we have to consider crucial *economic* and *ideological* instances of this new emerging paradigm and integrate them into a cogent analytical framework. Needless to say, however, that if the great powers jump on the American-led bandwagon of consensus in the near future, then we will have certainly re-entered the realist/neo-realist paradigm, although it will be explicitly enriched with new elements. For the time being, and regardless of whether the US-UK axis succeeds completely with its Iraqi gamble and the strategy of the ‘trasformation of the Middle East’, suffice it to say that the system of international relations may well not be the same as before. We have been witnessing a harsh clash between four European-Asian powers and two Anglo-saxon, ‘oceanic’ ones, over hegemony in the greater Middle East and, consequently, in Eurasia. The master of Eurasia is also the master of the world and strategies that lead towards this mastery are bound to be stained with blood, oil and ink from wet banknotes, all three to be found in the marshlands and deserts of the vast Eurasian continent.

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Notes

¹ The fact that the US has contributed to the break-up of the Soviet Union also via the encouragement of nationalist and secessionist movements there, has been admitted by key American policy-makers, such as Zbigniew Brzezinski; see in particular his *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geo-strategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), especially pp.145 ff.

² On this issue in particular, we are indebted to the pioneering work of Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble; Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance* (London: Verso, 1999).

³ See, Susan Woodward, *The Balkan Tragedy* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1995).

⁴ I follow here Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble*.

⁵ This is the theme I expand extensively in my *Zones of Conflict: US Foreign Policy in the Balkans and the Greater Middle East* (London: Pluto press, 2003), chapter 3.

⁶ See in particular, "Bush-Putin Joint Statement on New US-Russian Energy Dialogue," 24 May 2002, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news/689249/posts>

⁷ Among others, Fraser Cameron, *The Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p.84.

⁸ In this context, the article by John Vinocur ("The big winner in the EU expansion: Washington," *International Herald Tribune*, 9 December 2002, pp.1, 3) makes interesting reading.

⁹ Thomas L. Friedman, "A New global power structure," *International Herald Tribune*, 31 March 2003, p.8.

¹⁰ Perry Anderson, "Force and consent," *New Left Review*, 17, September-October 2002, <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR25101.shtml>

¹¹ See, Vassilis K. Fouskas, *Zones of Conflict*. NATO asked the Yugoslav delegation at Rambouillet, France, to comply with three conditions: the first was that within three years the Kosovo Albanians should have the chance of voting for independence and possible annexation of Albania; the second was that Yugoslavia should accept free market economic principles; and the third was that NATO forces should be given permission to deploy not only in Kosovo but *anywhere* in Yugoslavia.

¹² See, President of the United States, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, NSC, September 2002. On p.15 we read: "The United States has long maintained the option of pre-emptive action to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction – and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act pre-emptively... We cannot let our enemies strike first."

¹³ See, among others, Activities of the European Union, *Energy Charter*, September 1997, <http://www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/127028.htm>

¹⁴ See, Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The battle for energy dominance," *Foreign Affairs*, (March-April 2002), <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/articles/Morse0302.html>

¹⁵ On this issue, see in particular Bulent Gokay, "Controlling the Euro is US War Aim," <http://www.thesentinel.co.uk>

¹⁶ On the subject of Turkey's role as a "front-line" state serving US strategic interests in the greater Middle East, see Zalmay Khalilzad et al. (eds), *The Future of Turkish-Western Relations: Towards a Strategic Plan* (Arlington VA: RAND, 2000).

¹⁷ Bulent Gokay, "Controlling the Euro is US War Aim"; "The Unfinished Recession: A Survey of the World Economy," *The Economist*, 28 September 2002 (special insert).

¹⁸ However, the Kurdish issue is far more complicated. In the main, the Kurds in Northern Iraq are split between two rival, politically and militarily, groups, led by Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Barzani has been more conciliatory towards Saddam's regime and negotiated, with US support, a peaceful solution to the conflict along the lines of an autonomous Kurdish region. Talabani has been more radical, demanding an independent Kurdistan since 1988, but under US pressure after the end of the Gulf War, he surrendered this demand on the altar of a federal Iraq, within which the Kurds would enjoy their own administration and special privileges. All this, as was expected, in conjunction with the establishment of a no-fly zone in Northern Iraq protecting the Kurds from Saddam's airforce, alarmed Syria, Turkey and Iran.

¹⁹ It should be noted, however, that Turkish elites are split on the issue. Suleyman Demirel, Turkey's former President, argued that Turkey could not prevent the Kurds from having some gains anyway under the circumstances, and suggested that a "Kurdish state" or "administrative area" in Northern Iraq is not a threat to Turkey. See, Mehmet Ali Birand, "If Turkey was now a member of the EU...", *Politis* (Greek-Cypriot daily), 30 March 2003, p.13.

²⁰ One might also speculate that it is chiefly the UK that wants to keep the Turks out of Mosul, because of fear that Turkey may further upgrade its strategic posture in the Middle East, following its success in the Eastern Mediterranean, with the occupation of a Northern Cypriot zone since 1974. Cyprus is a member of the Commonwealth and Britain is also one of its guarantor powers, together with Greece and Turkey, since 1960.

²¹ PKK has played an important role in the shaping of a Kurdish national identity since 1984, when its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, founded this guerrilla force and launched a violent independence campaign against the Turkish state, which lasted virtually until January-February 1999, when Ocalan was captured by Turkish security forces in Nairobi, Kenya. The PKK has been considered by Turkey and most international organisations and states as a terrorist group.

²² Bulent Aras, *The New Geopolitics of Eurasia and Turkey's Position* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), p.17.

²³ On the Cyprus issue and the relevant discussion about the role of 'exogenous' and 'endogenous' factors, see among others, Vassilis K. Fouskas and Heinz A. Richter (eds), *Cyprus and Europe: The Long Way Back* (Manhheim: Bibliopolis, 2003). For the case of Yugoslavia, I would refer to the informed and interesting debate between Stevan K. Pavlowitch and Peter Gowan in *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, v.1, n.2, November 1999.

²⁴ See, for example, Ofra Bengio, 'The Challenge to Territorial Integrity of Iraq', *Survival*, vol.37, no.2, (Summer 1995), pp.74-94, Charles Tripp, "The Foreign Policy of Iraq," in Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds), *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (London: Lynne Rienner publishers, 2002), pp.167-192. Bengio's text, in particular, is very instructive and full of useful information.

²⁵ All quotations from "Birth of a Bush doctrine?" *The Economist*, 1 March 2003, pp.44-5.

²⁶ Michael Scott Doran, 'Palestine, Iraq and American Strategy', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.82, no.1, (January-February 2003), pp.22, 32.

²⁷ Peter Gowan, "A calculus of power," *New Left Review*, no.16, (July-August 2002), <http://www.newleftreview.net>. However, one should avoid seeing a strategic break or discontinuity between the Clinton and Bush Jr. administrations. Clinton's team had been under constant pressure from conservative policy-makers and businessmen, such as Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Armitage, Dick Cheney and Richard Perle and therefore had to strike a balance between them and his Democrats. The notion of "pre-emptive strike" itself had been put forward and elaborated in full by Robert Kagan and William Kristol in an influential article published in *Foreign Affairs* back in 1996 (see, "Toward a neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, vol.75, no.4, (July-August 1996)). Then we should not forget the occasional bombing of Iraq throughout the 1990s, as well as the co-ordinated US-UK strike on Iraqi targets of December 1998, 'prompted by Saddam's refusal to co-operate with weapons inspectors' (see, Steven R. Weisman, "Doctrine of Pre-emptive Wars Has Its roots in Early 1990s," *International Herald Tribune*, 24 March 2003, p.6).

²⁸ See, James Bennet, "Israel lays hopes on success of US arms," *International Herald Tribune*, 25 February 2003, pp.1, 5.

²⁹ No WMD have been found in Iraq to date and the CIA has since May 2003 begun 'a review to try to determine whether the US intelligence community erred in its pre-war assessments of Saddam Hussein's government and Iraq's weapons programmes', see James Risen, "Prewar Data on Iraq Under Review by CIA," *International Herald Tribune*, 23 May 2003, p.2.

³⁰ Bulent Gokay, "Oil, war and global hegemony," unpublished paper, Keele University, Keele, 28 February 2002, p.7.

³¹ Gopaldaswami Parthasarathy, "War against Terrorism and the Oil and Gas Dimensions," <http://www.rediff.com/news/gp.htm>

³² Perry Anderson, "Force and consent."

³³ Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: the Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), p.31. In his more recent *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Nye works further on the notion of consensus and its significance among core US allies in the exercise of US world hegemonic power.