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**DARIO
BATTISTELLA**

The Post-Cold War Order as a One-Dimensional World



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COLECCIÓN DE
ESTUDIOS INTERNACIONALES

DARIO BATTISTELLA

**The Post-Cold War Order
as a One-Dimensional
World**



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DARIO BATTISTELLA

The Post-Cold War Order as a One-Dimensional World

1. Introduction

This research purports to propose an analysis of the contemporary world system. Some twenty years after the end of the Cold War, what are the main features of the existing order? Are they likely to endure or to collapse? And if so, why? In order to provide answers to these questions, we will rely upon a neoclassical realist framework¹. The specificity of neoclassical realism consists in explaining a dependent variable by ascribing it to an independent variable on one hand, and an intermediary variable on the other. Our dependent variable being the post-Cold War world order, to apply neoclassical realism is tantamount to analysing the structure of the interstate system that we consider to be the independent variable and the nature of the contemporary international society that we consider to be the intermediary variable. Thanks to this hierarchical synthesis, we will show that the contemporary world order is all at once:

- unipolar for what concerns the structure of the interstate system, that is to say the distribution of economic and military power resources among major state-actors,
- uniform for what regards the nature of international society, because of the (neo)liberal values underpinning the norms regulating international relations.

¹ For synthetic presentations of neoclassical realism, see G. Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51 (1), October 1998, p. 144-172; S. Lobell, N. Ripsman & J. Taliaferro (eds), *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009; A. Toje & B. Kunz (eds), *Neoclassical Realism in Europe: Bringing Power Back In*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2012.

It is our claim that the coexistence of these two dominations —material and ideational— benefiting one and the same set of political entities —the US and its Western allies— is far from a coincidence. There actually exists some kind of a mutual, and even a dialectical, reinforcement between the two dimensions of Western pre-eminence: the prevalence of neoliberal norms reflects the material superiority of Western powers and, first and foremost, of the US; the supremacy of the US and its Western allies is legitimised and reproduced by the liberal or neo-liberal norms regulating the institutionalised international political game. To put it differently, the contemporary world order is close to be a one-dimensional world —a concept borrowed from Herbert Marcuse².

As such, this world order is even more favourable to the Western world than imagined by two of the best-known world-order scenarios proposed immediately before or after the end of the Cold War by Francis Fukuyama and Charles Krauthammer. While being overall optimistic, and in any case much more optimistic than the alternative predictions of Samuel Huntington and Henry Kissinger, the two pundits had also repeatedly underscored what they considered to be the threats likely to endanger the existing order favourable to Western powers: they warned against the perils emanating from states headed by irrational dictators, they anticipated an uncontrollable spread of weapons of mass destruction, they awaited troubles in Western societies because of massive migration flows. To put it bluntly: they were convinced that the stability of the American world order and the security of the major Western states had to be secured by assertive policies against various kinds of troublemakers.

² H. Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964.

After summing up the four world scenarios proposed some twenty years ago, we will demonstrate that, actually, quite the opposite is true. For what concerns the structure of the interstate system, the unipolar stability of the contemporary world order at the system level is guaranteed and the security of the major democratic powers at the unit level is anything but seriously threatened. Regarding the nature of international society, its uniformity is reproduced and even enhanced by the (neo-)liberal norms underlying the rules regulating the interactions among states. This does not mean that the end of history is definitely triumphing: in our last point, we will quickly evoke the potential trends, which may prevail in the future.

2. World Order Scenarios

Historical watersheds almost automatically provoke a multiplicity of various kinds of predictions trying to foresee the future. Logically thus, the end of the Cold War incited major American scholars and experts to propose world order scenarios. Four among them were paramount: Fukuyama's end-of-history thesis; Krauthammer's unipolar-moment claim; Huntington's clash-of-civilizations hypothesis; and Kissinger's return-to-multipolarity model.

The first scenario, proposed by Francis Fukuyama in his famous end-of-history thesis, was inspired by his reading of Kant's and Hegel's philosophies of history³. According to Fukuyama, the end of the Cold War, which he was almost the only one to anticipate, as indeed his analysis was published some months before of the breakdown of the Berlin wall, actually means “the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolu-

³ F. Fukuyama, “The End of History?”, *The National Interest*, 16, Summer 1989, p. 3-16.

tion and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government”, given the defeat of communism and the absence of whatever alternative model likely to challenge the pre-eminence of democracy as the best regime to satisfy basic human needs: security, prosperity, recognition. Despite this ideological victory however, democracy has not triumphed everywhere yet, and the real world is divided into two zones: a post-historical zone, composed by liberal market democracies primarily focusing on “economic activity” without “struggle or conflict over large issues” and living in a state of peace and cooperation among themselves; and a still historical zone, composed by those societies and states still characterised by political violence within them and armed conflicts among each other. Sooner or later, the historical zone will be integrated in the post-historical universal homogenous state within which “the struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands”. In the meantime, the post-historical West should actively defend its gains through a league of democratic nations, capable of forceful action to protect its collective security from threats arising from the non-democratic part of the world and not hesitating to expand the sphere of democracy, where possible.

The second scenario was the “unipolar moment” scenario proposed by Charles Krauthammer⁴. Starting from the fact that the Cold War period had been a bipolar system opposing the American camp to the Soviet bloc and that this bipolarity had come to an end following the breakdown of the Soviet Union's dominance over Eastern Europe, Krauthammer straightaway

⁴ C. Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment”, *Foreign Affairs*, 70 (1), America and the World 1990/91, p. 23-33.

excludes the hypothesis of a multipolar post-Cold War world system: “There is today no lack of second-rank powers. Germany and Japan are economic dynamos. Britain and France can deploy diplomatic and to some extent military assets. The Soviet Union possesses several elements of power —military, diplomatic and political— but all are in rapid decline”. He then logically asserts the existence of a unipolar structure defined by the pre-eminence of the US: “The immediate post-Cold War world is not multipolar. It is unipolar. The centre of world power is the unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies. ... American pre-eminence is based on the fact that it is the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself”. This being said, Krauthammer nonetheless thinks that unipolarity is anything but stable, because of a strategic environment characterised by “the rise of small aggressive states armed with weapons of mass destruction and possessing the means to deliver them (what might be called Weapon States), makes the coming decades a time of heightened, not diminished threat of war”. The US therefore has to adopt an interventionist strategy consisting in “confronting, deterring and, if necessary, disarming states that brandish and use weapons of mass destruction”.

Published in 1993, the third scenario is Samuel Huntington's clash-of-civilizations thesis, often portrayed as the exact opposite of Fukuyama's prediction⁵. Huntington believes that the 21st century will be characterised by conflicts rather than by cooperation and, more specifically, he posits that the conflicts concerned will be due neither to ideological enmity, as was the case throughout the Cold War, nor to power-political rivalries comparable to the ones prevailing during the Westphalian system up to the twentieth century's world wars, but by cultural conflicts: “The most important conflicts of the

⁵ S. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?”, *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (2), March-April 1993, p. 22-49.

future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating ... the Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization, ... from one another". According to Huntington, "the fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future" because different civilizations "have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy". It is first and foremost the Western civilization on the one hand, and a kind of Confucian-Islamic connection on the other hand, which will oppose each other. Arabic-Islamic and Chinese-style societies do not merely reject the Western values that the Western powers try, consciously or unconsciously, to spread all over the world, but are also eager to assert their own values and norms: the stage thus is set for a return of the "West *versus* the Rest" logic which actually has been dominating world politics since the Middle Ages. Concerning the policy implications of this prediction, Huntington comes to the conclusion that in the long run the Western civilization will have to learn, willingly or reluctantly, to coexist with other civilizations; in the short run, however, it should not hesitate to maintain its military superiority, promote greater cooperation and unity between its European and North American components, exploit conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states, support other civilization groups sympathetic to Western values and interests and strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate Western interests and values.

Last but not least, a fourth scenario was proposed by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1994⁶. While betting on a revival of historical patterns too, Kissinger remains close to a more classical approach in postulating that nation states will go on being the fundamental actors in world poli-

⁶ H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1994.

tics. Given that “nations have more frequently competed than they have cooperated [and] that there is little evidence to suggest that this old-age model of behavior has changed, or that it is likely to change in the decades ahead”, he foresees the return of a multipolar system fairly comparable to the one that had structured the international order from the seventeenth century to World War Two. Due to the world-wide scale of the contemporary international system, this system will no longer be focused on Europe, but will be characterised by the presence of five or six major powers: the US, Russia, China, Japan, probably India and possibly Europe, in the case of its political unification. Guided by national interests egoistically defined in terms of power, these major actors will have conflicting interactions, and the ensuing international system will be “far more complex than any previously encountered by American diplomacy”, as indeed the US, while being “the greatest and most powerful nation”, will rather be a mere “nation with peers, the *primus inter pares* but nonetheless a nation like others”. Ultimately, the only way to achieve order in such a system will consist for “statesmen who represent vastly different cultures” to combine classical balancing strategies based on rational calculations of their respective interests and capacities and innovative practices still to be invented.

Traditional comparisons of these four scenarios oppose the two former, overall optimistic from a Western point of view, to the latter two, fairly pessimistic: in Fukuyama's and Krauthammer predictions, the world is dominated by the US and its Western allies, be this domination non-material, i.e. ideological, as in Fukuyama's approach, or material, based on economic and military capacities, as in Krauthammer's proposal. Conversely, Huntington and Kissinger anticipate a world torn by conflicts opposing the US and its allies to either cultural enemies, as is the case of Huntington's clash-of-civilization thesis, or strategic rivals, as is the case of Kissinger's hypothesis of the return of multipolarity. Another classification is possible, focusing on the

substantial structure of the IR discipline and taking into account the paradigmatic approaches implicitly or explicitly underlying the four predictions concerned: Fukuyama's and Huntington's scenarios are broadly inspired by a liberal outlook in proposing an inside-outside analysis ascribing international politics to domestically prevailing values, ideological in the first case and cultural in the second; Krauthammer's and Kissinger's scenarios, on the contrary, share the basic postulates of realism in putting forward third-image analyses ascribing the foreign policy relations of states to the systemic distribution of power resources among major states, whatever the specific version of realism they adhere to: the power cycle theory as in Krauthammer's analysis, or the balance of power theory as in Kissinger's forecasting.

Twenty years or so after these predictions were published, how do they withstand reality?⁷ Are they still relevant to better understand the basic features of the contemporary world? Our answer is 'yes'. More accurately, it is our claim that today's real world order overall corroborates Fukuyama's and Krauthammer's optimism and, on the whole, refutes Huntington's and Kissinger's pessimism. Better still, the validity of Fukuyama's liberal prediction basically depends on the relevance of Krauthammer's realist framework: liberal values in the normative sphere rule because of the durability of a unipolar interstate system characterised by America's material primacy.

3. A unipolar interstate system

To claim that the structure of an interstate system is characterised by unipolarity is tantamount to saying that there is only one major power dominating all the other powers which, by definition, are therefore secondary powers.

⁷ See also C. Fettweis, « Evaluating IR's Crystal Balls. How Predictions of the Future Have Withstood Fourteen Years of Unipolarity », *International Studies Review*, 6 (1), March 2004, p. 79-104.

At first sight, to say that the post-Cold War world is unipolar looks like a truism: throughout the Cold War the world was characterised by bipolarity, because of the presence of two opposed alliances, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, headed by the then existing two superpowers, the US and the USSR. The Cold War came to an end because of the breakdown of one of the two superpowers, the USSR; logically then the structure of the post-Cold War system cannot but be unipolar, because only one superpower survived, the US. And yet, according to many scholars, things are supposed to be more complicated. Beyond Kissinger, the best and the brightest (neo)realist scholars in the US, be they adherents of defensive or offensive realism, foresaw the return of multipolarity after a necessarily short period of unipolarity. Kenneth Waltz, for instance, wrote that “balance-of-power theory leads us to predict that other powers will try to bring American power into balance. ... Hegemony leads to balance. That is now happening, but haltingly so because the US still has benefits to offer and many other countries have become accustomed to their easy lives with the US bearing many of their burdens”⁸. As for John Mearsheimer, in his analysis of post-Cold War Europe he went as far as establishing a causal link between the return of multipolarity and a greater risk of instability and wars: “The multipolar distribution of power ... characterized the European state system from its founding, with the Peace of Westphalia, in 1648, until 1945. We know that this multipolar European state system was plagued by war from first to last. ... Europe is reverting to a state system that created powerful incentives for aggression in the past”⁹.

Obviously, this sombre outlook has been belied by empirical realities. Why? Because the afore-mentioned analyses are missing the authentic meaning of unipolarity versus multipolarity, as becomes obvious when reca-

⁸ K. Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics”, *International Security*, 18 (2), Autumn 1993, p. 44-79.

⁹ J. Mearsheimer, « Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War », *The Atlantic Monthly*, 266 (2), August 1990, p. 35-50.

ling the definition of power as an actor and power as a factor. Indeed, in order to know what we mean when we assert that a state is or is not a power, thus being able to state how many powerful states there are in an interstate system and deducing if its structure is uni-, bi-, or multi-polar, we first have to define the significance of power.

In mainstream International Relations just as in general political science, there are two main conceptions of power¹⁰:

- power is traditionally defined in terms of resources available to an actor, and seen from this perspective, a state is a major power if the resources at its disposal are comparatively superior to the resources available to other states;
- power is also defined in terms of the influence an actor is likely to exert upon another actor, and in this case a state is said to be a power if it is likely to impose its will upon another state and able to get it to do what it wants it to do.

Positing that the two definitions are compatible with, and complementary to each other, we can make the following hypothesis: an interstate system is unipolar if there exists one, and only one, state benefiting from such a gap in material resources, that the other states are led to behave the way the major power wants them to behave or, at least, if they are induced to behave in a way unlikely to threaten the major power's national interest. Put differently: unipolarity exists if, and it prevails as long as, secondary powers do not try to balance the resources' gap that exists in favour of the preeminent power; in other words if, and as long as, secondary powers are unable, and/or unwilling, to replace an imbalanced, unipolar distribution of power resources by a more balanced, either bipolar or multipolar, distribution of power resources.

¹⁰ For a presentation of both mainstream and post-positivist theories of power, see M. Barnett & R. Duvall, «Power in International Politics », *International Organization*, 59 (1), January 2005, p. 39-75.

It is our opinion that for more than twenty years now, international politics perfectly fits this hypothesis: the interstate structure of the post-Cold War world order is unipolar because it is characterised by an uneven, unequal distribution of power resources in favour of the US, and this resource gap is so huge that it discourages whatever secondary power to try to put an end to this imbalance by adopting a balancing behaviour.

Let's first have a look at the distribution of power resources¹¹. When looking at the elements considered to constitute the most important power resources, that is, the economic resources as measured by the GNP of states and the military resources as measured by their national defence budgets¹², there is no doubt that the post-Cold War world is characterised by a double supremacy of the US:

- in 2011, America's GNP amounted to 15 290 billion dollars, and the second most important GNP expressed at the official exchange rate, that is China's, amounted to 7 298 billions : in other words, the economic resources of the world's second best economy represented less than 50% of America's richness;
- concerning the military expenditures, in 2011 America's military budget amounted to 711 billion dollars, representing some 4.6% of its GNP, and America's military expenditures are more important than the amount dedicated to military budgets by China, Russia, Great Britain, France, India, Japan, Italy, and Brazil taken together:

¹¹ Given our neoclassical realist approach, the only elements of power we take into account in the analysis of our independent variable are material elements, also called hard power resources, and not soft power resources, whose importance is underlined by liberal scholars such as J. Nye, «Soft Power», *Foreign Policy*, 80, Autumn 1990, p. 153-171.

¹² The tradition consisting in simplifying the measurement of power by reducing it to the GNP and the military budget of a state goes back to K. Organski, *World Politics*, New York, Knopf, 1958.

¹³ The figures we use are those estimated by the CIA in its *CIA World Factbook* on <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

China's military budget amounted to 143 billion dollars, roughly equivalent to 2% of China's GNP, and about a fifth of America's military expenditures¹⁴.

These economic and military data prove that, twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the structure of the interstate system is unipolar for what concerns the distribution of power resources. Thus unipolarity actually is a historical era, and not merely a short “moment”, as stated by Krauthammer. Not only is American primacy in the global distribution of capabilities a salient feature of the contemporary interstate system, but the US, already materially preeminent at the end of the Cold War, “became even more so. We currently live in a one-superpower world, a circumstance unprecedented in the modern era. No other great power has enjoyed such advantages in material capabilities – military, economic, technological, and geographical”¹⁵.

What about the second dimension of power as influence? What about America's capacity to influence the secondary states' behaviour in order to make sure that their foreign policies are compatible with America's interests or, at least, not contradictory to them? Any attempt to propose an answer to this question has to start from the distinction made by realist scholars between the two balancing strategies at the disposal of states when thinking about how to put an end to the pre-eminence of one major power, that is, internal balancing and external balancing:

- internal balancing consists in increasing one's own military resources;

¹⁴ We use the statistics of the SIPRI Yearbook 2012: <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2012/04>.

¹⁵ J. Kenberry, M. Mastanduno, & W. Wohlforth (eds), *International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 1.

- external balancing consists in creating or joining alliances in order to cumulate within a coalition of forces the various military resources of the member states concerned¹⁶.

If now we have a look at the foreign policy of the secondary powers since 1989/91, there is no doubt that neither internal nor external balancing has been chosen as a strategy by any secondary power:

- concerning internal balancing, a quick analysis of the evolution of military budgets permits to assert that nowadays all the powers do dedicate less resources to military expenditures than during the Cold War, but that within this general trend, the one power whose military resources have been significantly less downsized as a percentage of national richness is the US: in other words, in relative terms, America's military advantage is higher than it used to be some twenty years ago, as acknowledged by Paul Kennedy who, after having predicted at the end of the eighties the relative decline of American pre-eminence, cannot but acknowledge that “nothing has ever existed like this disparity of power, nothing. ... I have returned to all of the comparative defense spending and military personnel statistics over the past 500 years that I compiled in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, and no other nation comes close”¹⁷;
- concerning external balancing, neither any formal alliance nor any informal coalition has been established by secondary states with a view to counterbalance America's preponderance. The most striking illustration of this reality is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization created in 2001 by China and Russia together with four Central Asian States — and former Soviet Republics: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and

¹⁶ The distinction is made by K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1979, p. 168.

¹⁷ A. Quoted in J. Ikenberry, M. Mastanduno, & W. Wohlforth (eds), *International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity*, p. 11.

Kyrgyzstan, whose main objectives do not relate to their prospective attitudes towards the US, but cooperation in the domain of regional security concerns such as terrorism and separatism. They are afraid of becoming themselves victims of, notably, Islamic activists.

The absence of any attempt to balance America's preeminent capabilities is the most obvious proof of the unipolar structure of the contemporary interstate system. In order for such a structure to be multipolar, the mere presence of secondary powers is not sufficient, nor is the rise of the so-called emerging powers forming the BRICS-group: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa. First and foremost, such secondary powers do also have to adopt a balancing behaviour, either by increasing their military resources or by putting their military resources together within alliances or coalitions, with an explicit view at creating a balance by reducing the gap between the superpower on the one hand and the other powers on the other hand. Until today, this has not been the case, and therefore the interstate system structure is unipolar.

Given the predictions made some twenty years ago, how can we explain that there is no secondary power adopting a balancing behaviour? What are the reasons of the secondary power's acceptance of the existing unipolar order and the ensuing durability of this *pax americana*?

The answer to this seeming enigma is threefold: it refers all at once to America's perceived status as an overall benign hegemon, to its capacity to act as an indispensable facilitator of other states' interests, and to the internalisation of its dominance as legitimate by some major secondary powers.

First of all, the US is not perceived by secondary powers as threatening their national interests, defined in terms of security, and this perception goes back to 1945. Ever since its decision to definitely drop isolationism and

intervene in world affairs, the US behaves like a benevolent hegemon and not like an imperial power, thanks to its willingness to associate the secondary powers, accepting the existing order, to the benefits of this order. Seen from a historical point of view, such great power behaviour is fairly rare. The only comparable example was the UK during the so-called *pax britannica* in the first half of the 19th century, whereas for instance France, after its victory in the Thirty Years War in 1648, did not adopt self-restraint: quite on the contrary, it decided to profit from the window of opportunity represented by its victory against its Austrian and Spanish rivals to try to expand its predominance, thus compelling the other European powers—the UK, Prussia and Russia—to ally in order to cope with this threat to their own security. To say the US behaves like a benevolent hegemon in its relation with secondary powers does not mean that it acts altruistically: obviously the US adopts self-restraint because it is in Washington interests to consolidate its predominance in the long run by stopping short of misusing its strength, but whatever its motivations, such a behaviour pre-empts the rise of potential adversaries eager to end America's prevalence¹⁸.

Secondly, the US is not merely perceived as a non-threatening superpower by many secondary powers in the world but, more positively, as an indispensable ally and/or an honest broker. What is fascinating about the US is that it has succeeded in winning acceptance as an ally by former adversaries, such as for instance Germany and Japan: both were crushed by the US during World War Two, and yet since 1945 they are among America's closest allies. The evolution of the relationship between the US and Vietnam is just as striking. The US fought a bloody war against Vietnam during the sixties and the first half of the seventies, but today Vietnam needs the US in order to try to cope with China's inhibiting presence on its northern border.

¹⁸ A. Our analysis is broadly inspired by J. Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000.

Even America's enemies cannot but look to Washington if they want their interests to be furthered, as shown by the example of the Palestinians: they know that their enemy, Israel, is supported by the US¹⁹, but nevertheless the only possibility for them to succeed in obtaining their own state is to ask Washington to try to moderate Israel's behaviour. In a nutshell, Washington has successfully been applying Bismarck's so-called Bad Kissingen strategy, in making itself more indispensable to any given state than any other third state: suffice it to recall that even those states that do not need America's protection or arbitration are dependent on its resources, as is the case of France or the UK, who need America's —or NATO's— support whenever they decide to intervene militarily, as happened during Operation *Odyssey Dawn* against Qaddafi's Libya in 2011²⁰.

This last example gives us an idea of the third reason why America's preponderance does not provoke balancing behaviour in secondary powers. This reason concerns Western democracies: European states as well as, of course, Canada and Australia, share the same values as the US, the same collective identity. Particularly relevant in this perspective has been Nicolas Sarkozy's speech in 2009 when he decided that France would reintegrate in the unified military command of the NATO. He said: “America is our ally, America is our friend”. It is not by accident that he used the term “friend”: France, Germany, the UK, etc., conceive of the US as a friend and not merely as an ally, and this perception is reciprocal. In other words, the Atlantic Alliance is not, strictly speaking, an alliance; it is a security community, composed of states that do not even imagine going to war against each other and that spontaneously help each other in the case of a threat emanating from a third party against one among

¹⁹ On America's unconditional support of Israel, see J. Mearsheimer & S. Walt, *The Israel lobby and US Foreign Policy*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Girous, 2007.

²⁰ On America's indispensability, see J. Joffe, “How America Does It”, *Foreign Affairs*, 76, (5), September-October 1997, p. 13-27.

them²¹. If NATO had been a mere alliance, it would have been dissolved after the end of the Cold War, given the breakdown of the Warsaw Pact and the absence of any major threat to cope with. NATO however, while having been created in 1949 to counter the Soviet communist threat, did not disappear, quite the contrary: it expanded, accepted new members and staged military operations it had never launched during the Cold War. The fact that NATO is still alive and well proves that America's allies or, actually, friends, consider America's world leadership as legitimate and that they have internalised the existing *pax americana* and consider it a legitimate order. They do not even conceive of the possibility of trying to change this order by adopting a balancing behaviour, thus refuting those predictions which, some twenty years ago, foresaw a breakup of North Atlantic solidarity: "In a multipolar world, the US as the strongest power will often find other states edging away from it: Germany moving toward Eastern Europe and Russia, and Russia moving toward Germany and Japan. ... We must wonder how long NATO will last as an effective organization. As is often said, organizations are created by their enemies. Alliances are organized against their perceived threats. ... How can an alliance endure in the absence of a worthy opponent? ... NATO's days are not numbered, but its years are"²². The best evidence of this refutation was brought in some ten years ago, when the Iraqi crisis and Operation *Iraqi Freedom* provoked a split between the US and the UK on the one hand, and France and Germany on the other. Suspected of adopting a so-called "soft balancing" strategy²³ when they decided to join China and Russia in criticising Washington's willingness to

²¹ On security communities in general, see K. Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957, as well as E. Adler & M. Barnett (eds), *Security Communities*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998. On the evolution of NATO, see J.-Y. Haine, *Les Etats-Unis ont-ils besoin d'alliés?*, Paris, Plon, 2004.

²² K. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics", *op. cit.*

²³ On soft balancing, see the special issue of *International Security*, 30, (1), Spring 2005, and notably R. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the USA", p. 7-45.

go to war against Saddam Hussein, France and Germany actually reaffirmed their solidarity to America's policy once Operation *Iraqi Freedom* was followed by a state-building policy in Iraq legitimated by UN Security Council's resolution 1483 (2003).

The combination of these causes explain a last important feature of the contemporary unipolar structure, that, is, its lasting stability.

In international relations theory, an interstate system is considered to be stable as long as there exists no risk of major war among the major powers, which is tantamount to saying that stability prevails as long as “no [major] state believes it profitable to attempt to change the system”²⁴ by launching a war against other major states. Given that, guided by rationality, a state is likely to believe that it is profitable to launch such a war “if the expected benefits exceed the expected costs”²⁵, the question that deserves to be raised is which configuration of power offers less opportunities for a state to expect net gains from its decision to go to war. This question has received contending answers.

According to adherents of the balance of power theory, such as Hans Morgenthau, Henry Kissinger and Kenneth Waltz, a balanced distribution of power resources is the only configuration likely to preserve stability. As every state knows that every other state has approximately the same amount of military force, no state can rationally think that it can easily win a war; anticipating a very low expected utility of war, every state is obviously incited to prefer peaceful conflict resolution, thus favouring stability at the system level. Conversely, when a state has acquired more capacities than the

²⁴ R. Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 50.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

other states of a system, or when a state is suspected of trying to acquire more capabilities than the rest and is perceived as being potentially able to put an end to the existing balance, then the risks of war are higher, the ensuing war being either a major war, in the case the imbalance is effective, or a limited adjustment war in the case the imbalance is anticipated. Within this balance of power theory, authors such as Morgenthau or Kissinger think that multipolarity is a more stability-prone structure, whereas theorists such as Waltz are in favour of the stability-through-bipolarity thesis. According to the former two, in a multipolar balance, which exists when the international system is constituted by at least three great powers roughly equal in force, every state is incited to adopt a prudent foreign policy. First of all, because there are no rigid alliance patterns among the great powers: a state has neither eternal friends nor perpetual enemies, but only temporary allies, which can become rivals, and opponents, which can transform into allies according to the national interest they pursue. The uncertainty felt by every state because of the possibility of crosscutting loyalties favours prudence. Moreover, because of the relatively high number of great powers in a multipolar system —at least three—, there are always sufficient third powers that accept to play the role of an intermediate broker, thus favouring diplomatic conflict resolution. According to Waltz, bipolar structures, in which two powers dominate all the other states and force them to adhere to one or the other of the two alliances created by the prevailing powers, it is the rigidity of the system that favours stability. Given that in such a system the two great powers have interests everywhere in the world, they are not merely prudent in their direct relationship, but also control their smaller allies in order not to be dragged into an armed conflict by an imprudent member of their own camp. Furthermore, as there are only two powers, the behaviour of smaller powers withdrawing from their alliance in order to become neutral or even to join the enemy's alliance does not significantly change the overall power distribution, because in a bipolar system, by definition, the

allies are weak compared to the two dominating powers. Finally, it is much easier for each superpower to know exactly what the other may be tempted to do than when there are a lot of contenders to keep under scrutiny. This certainty concerning the behaviour of the other superpower avoids the risks of misperceptions, which often contribute to the escalation of disputes into armed conflicts.

According to power cycles theorists, such as Kenneth Organski and his disciples of the power transition theory on the one hand²⁶, and Robert Gilpin and his hegemonic war theory on the other hand, it is precisely the highest possible degree of certainty held by all the states in a unipolar system which, according to them, explains that this structure is the most stable. Indeed, in a unipolar structure characterised by an unequal distribution of power resources, no power, whether major or secondary, is tempted to believe that it might be in its interest to try to change the system by launching a war:

- secondary powers, lacking significant military capabilities, cannot expect a positive utility of resorting to violence, and thus they stop short of challenging the existing stability military;
- the dominant power does not need to resort to arms in order to maintain the existing order, because it can impose its will by the mere reputation of its power capacities, and furthermore it is not in its interest to wage wars, because by expanding militarily it would increase the security dilemma of the secondary powers which could be tempted to balance against it instead of bandwagoning with it and behaving like satisfied powers²⁷.

²⁶ See K. Organski & J. Kugler, *The War Ledger*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1980, and R. Tammen et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century*, New York, Chatham House, 2000.

²⁷ See W. Wohlforth, «The Stability of a Unipolar World», *International Security*, 24 (1), Spring 1999, p. 5-41.

Let's now evaluate these theories. For what concerns their logical coherence, the balance of power theory contradicts the bedrock assumptions of realism, and more precisely Hobbes's conception of the state of war. In Hobbes' *Leviathan*, in the state of nature men are in a state of war not merely because of their egoism and jealousy and their will to power, but because of their equality: "Nature has made men **so equal** in the faculties of body and mind as that ... the difference between man and man is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he. ... **From this equality** of ability arises equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only) endeavour to destroy or subdue one another" (our emphasis). If Hobbes is right, if the roots of the state of war among men have to be found in their "equality of ability", and if states are "but artificial men" as Hobbes asserts, then the equality of states, synonymous with a balance of power among them, is a cause of war, and not of stability. In Hobbes' theory, the stability of a political system and the security of every member of the system are only imaginable when there is an inequality of ability thanks to the presence of a sovereign authority—the Leviathan actually—above the members of the system. Given that there can be no such Leviathan above states in the international environment characterised by anarchy, stability has to be promoted by an *ersatz* of central authority, and this *ersatz* is the preeminent power playing a comparable stabilising role thanks to the deterring effect of its preponderant capabilities.

The power cycle theory is also empirically more relevant, because the explanation it provides for the alternative occurring of war and peace is more coherent than the contending explanations proposed by the balance of power theory. In the first one hundred and fifty years following the Westphalian

Treaties, the European-centred international system was multipolar, but anything but stable. The roughly equal distribution of material resources provoked never-ending rivalries for the leadership of the system and ended up in regularly occurring wars opposing France, Spain, Austria, the United Provinces, Great Britain, to name but the greatest powers, committed to shifting alliances and guided by the will to become the successors of the hegemonic Habsburgs. Stability eventually occurred after Napoleon's definitive defeat. According to the adherents of the balance of power theory, the stability of the nineteenth century was due to the multipolar distribution of power among the five major powers concerned: the UK, Russia, France, Austria and Prussia. This statement, however, neglects the hidden realities of the nineteenth century system, composed by one dominant nation, Great Britain, and the four Continental powers. As indeed Great Britain did not accumulate more power than all the other states taken together, the then existing power configuration was not inconsistent with the definition of the balance of power; but as the four continental powers did not form a coalition against the United Kingdom but rather fought amongst each other, for instance during the Crimean War or the wars of the Italian and German unifications, the net result of the distribution of power was a unipolar, imbalanced, structure of the worldwide system, coexisting with a multipolar, balanced, structure of the regional Continental system.

This unipolar structure is acknowledged by the power cycle which therefore is convincing when explaining the nineteenth century's stability by the *Pax Britannica* and when ascribing the cycle of the two world wars to the relative decline of the British preponderance, due to its imperial overstretch and to the rise of a dissatisfied Germany, first imperial then Nazi, eager to replace the UK on top of the world. The power cycle theory also explains the structure of the post-World War Two system. This system was bipolar for what concerns its military structure, but the power configuration was unequal for what concerns the economic resources, characterised by a huge gap in favour of the

US, as indeed the Soviet GNP reached, at best, only 50% of America's richness: because of the balance of terror, the system was perceived to be unstable, but actually the risks of a major war were very low, given the incapacity of the USSR to be a credible contender of America's superiority. Once the USSR, under Gorbachev's administration, acknowledged its incapacity to challenge America's pre-eminence, the Cold War came to a peaceful end, and ever since then, the system is at once objectively unipolar and inter-subjectively acknowledged as such.

The logical consequence of this unipolarity is the stability of the contemporary interstate system, synonymous with a long peace among the major powers, the US on the one hand, the secondary powers on the other. The limited and short wars fought by the US and its allies against Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Libya do not refute this analysis, for the very simple reason that with the exception of Operation *Desert Storm* against Iraq in 1991, they were chosen and not necessary wars²⁸. Waged against so-called rogue regimes guilty of, mainly, inappropriate conduct against their own populations, and not against secondary powers likely to embody a threat against the prevailing hierarchy, these wars of intervention actually corroborate our analysis:

- firstly because the fact that the US and its allies can afford to wage such wars indirectly proves that no imminent threat endangers the unipolar structure;
- secondly because these wars are the normative counterpart of the Western states' material primacy.

It is this dimension that we will analyse in our next point, relative to the undergoing process of uniformisation of the contemporary international society.

²⁸ J. Mearsheimer & S. Walt, "An Unnecessary War", *Foreign Policy*, 134, January-February 2003, p. 51-59.

4. A uniform international society

Whereas an international system is traditionally defined as a set of states having sufficiently regular interactions with one another “to make the behaviour of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other”, an international society “exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions”²⁹, with a view to regulating their interactions peacefully through diplomacy, negotiation, dialogue and compromise, rather than through warfare.

Such an international society has existed since the Westphalian Treaties in 1648. By signing these treaties, the warring parties of the Thirty Years War definitely put an end to the *Respublica Christiana* and aimed at maintaining the stability of the international order at the systemic level and preserving the security of its individual members at the unit level thanks to the establishment of two basic rules:

- the sovereignty principle,
- the just war norm.

The sovereignty principle had an external and an internal dimension. The external dimension, *rex est imperatur in regno suo*, specified that states were no subject to whatever political authority above them, but independent from each other and equal to each other. The internal dimension, *cujus regio ejus religio*, was referring to the non-interference norm, according to which no state had the right to intervene in the matters within the domestic jurisdiction of another state. Today, the two dimension of the sovereignty princi-

²⁹ H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1977, p. 10, 13.

ple are explicitly acknowledged in the UN, whose General Assembly is functioning on the basis of the 'one state one vote' practice, and whose article 2.7 of the Charter recalls that “nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state”, a postulate fairly often reconfirmed since 1945, for instance in the UN Assembly General Resolution 1514 (XV) relative to the right of self-determination adopted in 1960.

Concerning the just war norm, only defensive wars waged by sovereign entities in order to repulse an attack or to cope with an imminent threat were considered to be legitimate, as specified by one of the founding fathers of modern international law, Emer de Vattel: “The foundation, or cause, of every just war is injury, either already done or threatened. The justificatory reasons for war show that an injury has been received, or so far threatened as to authorize a prevention of it by arms”. Until World War One, this just war doctrine was directly linked to the balance of power practice: the aim pursued was less international peace than international stability, and every state invoked the norm unilaterally, according to its own national interest. Things have evolved under the impulse of Woodrow Wilson's liberalism revisited by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The League of Nations Charter and, above all, the United Nations Charter, were no longer merely eager to limit the use of force, but aimed at forbidding it: wars — other than defensive ones and pre-emptive strikes which, everything else being equal, go on being considered legitimate— are nowadays stigmatised as crimes of aggression and definitely no longer perceived to be the mere continuation of policy by other means that used to be the case in the past. Furthermore, the established collective security system introduced multilateralism: the UN Security Council is the only authority legitimate to allow the waging of what Hugo Grotius had called “solemn wars”, in determining

the existence or not of any threat to peace or act of aggression and in deciding what measures should be taken in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.

According to Hedley Bull and Adam Watson³⁰, this Westphalian society has been genuinely international, i.e. at the same time universal and pluralist. Pluralist because it is hinged upon the Grotian principle of all the states' equal sovereignty: whatever their size, power, regime or location, all its members contribute to establish appropriate norms of conduct. Universal because it is a worldwide society. Despite its European origins, the international society progressively expanded geographically to include the whole planet earth, and the existence of the UN proves the contemporary international society's universal scope. The combination of pluralism and universalism tends to indicate it is their shared interest, rather than their collective identity, that incited states to create such an international society: given the various, pretty often incompatible, values held by states all over the world, the sharing of a common interest to cooperate was the necessary condition for states to agree in establishing generally accepted rules liable to regulate their interactions and to be respected most of the time. In other words, Westphalia and its contemporary institutionalisation in the form of the UN, are first and foremost rational undertakings, aiming at permitting all the states to better satisfy their common interest in systemic stability and their national interest in gains through cooperation, rather than normative undertakings, aiming at permitting some states to better spread their values to other entities.

Proposed during the sixties and seventies, and as such shaped by the context of both the Cold War rivalry and the prevalence of anti-colo-

³⁰ H. Bull & A. Watson (eds.), *The Expansion of International Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984; A. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*, London, Routledge, 1992.

nialism, Hedley Bull's interpretation has, as a whole, been corroborated during the first post-Cold War war, that is Operation *Desert Storm* authorised by UN resolution 678 (1990) and launched by the US and its allies, both Western and non-Western, in order to re-establish Kuwait's violated sovereignty. Proclaiming in his "New World Order" speech held on September 11, 1991, that "out of these troubled times, a new world order can emerge, ... a world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle", George H. Bush announced that he acted in accordance with those Westphalian or Lockean norms central to the pluralist conception of international society. Operation *Desert Storm* was indeed decided in conformity with the substantial and procedural points of Chapter VII of the UN Charter: immediately after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the Security Council "determined" that there was an "act of aggression" tantamount to a "breach of peace" on the part of Iraq; in its resolution 661 (1990), it decided to take "measures not involving the use of armed force" by imposing an economic embargo and allowing the deployment of Operation *Desert Shield*, in the hope that these measures would force Baghdad to withdraw its army; in Resolution 678 adopted on 29th November, 1990, it finally considered that these measures "have proved to be inadequate" and consequently decided to allow the United Nations member states to resort to armed violence in order to help Kuwait recover its sovereignty. Furthermore, Operation *Desert Storm* was limited to re-establishing the *status quo ante*, as the armies acting on the basis of the UN resolution were merely commissioned to force Iraqi troops to withdraw from Kuwait: the only objective pursued by Operation *Desert Storm* was to defend the violated sovereignty principle, not to provoke a regime change, and despite some pressures within the Bush administration to profit from the window of opportunity provided by Operation *Desert Storm* to conquer Baghdad and to put an end to Saddam Hussein's regime, this limit was respected.

Some years later, when the US, sometimes within the formal framework of NATO and other times at the head of coalitions of the willing, decided to send troops first to Bosnia and Kosovo, then to Afghanistan and once again to Iraq, and finally to Libya, the objectives pursued, and the underlying conception of international society, were no longer the same. A quick look at the reasons legitimating these operations tells us that these motivations were relative to what *French doctors* such as Bernard Kouchner called the duty to interfere as opposed to the non-interference principle, to what Canada and other middle powers named human security as opposed to national security, to what the former Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Gareth Evans referred to as the responsibility to protect as opposed to domestic jurisdiction. Nuances probably exist between these norms, but they ultimately refer to one idea, namely that a state's sovereignty is less important than its responsibility: in 1999, Kofi Annan put it bluntly when comparing “two concepts of sovereignty”, “state sovereignty” and “individual sovereignty”, and when he asserted the primacy of the latter by arguing that “states are now widely understood to be instruments at the service of their peoples, and not vice-versa”³¹.

Annan's statement perfectly mirrors the contemporary *Zeitgeist* characterised by a neo-liberal re-reading of existing norms. As a matter of fact, a thorough look at the UN Charter permits to see that it explicitly contains the principles on the basis of which the contemporary wars of intervention are justified: the preamble to the UN Charter proclaims its “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small”; article 1 stipulates that the achievement of “international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian charac-

³¹ Quoted in W. Bain, *Between Anarchy and Society. Trusteeship and the Obligations of Power*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 190.

ter, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion”, is one of the United Nations’ purposes. Throughout the Cold War, these principles were neglected, because of the then prevailing international *Zeitgeist* favourable to the sovereignty norm and the non-interference principle, but since the end of the Cold War, they are rediscovered, asserting that the non-interference principle had resulted in some governments killing their own people. The US and its Western allies came to the conclusion that the non-interference principle could no longer be invoked by governments tempted to crack down on their own population and that, consequently, those who would nevertheless massively violate basic human rights, would expose themselves to military interventions in their domestic affairs.

At first sight thus, operations *Allied Force* in Bosnia, *Deliberate Force* in Kosovo, *Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan, *Iraqi Freedom* in Iraq, and *Odyssey Dawn* in Libya seem less to go beyond traditional Lockean norms than they represent the substitution of one Lockean value that has been re-discovered —the human rights of individuals— for another one considered to produce perverse effects —the domestic sovereignty of state. However, to satisfy oneself with this interpretation omits what might be called the dark side of Locke's political thought, representative, when applied to international relations, of the “moral backwardness of the international society”³².

In the chapter dealing with property in his *Treatise on Civil Government*, Locke wrote that “in the beginning, all the world was America”, an allusion to indigenous societies in the Western hemisphere where there was no private property, no money, etc. To some extent this sen-

³² P. Keal, *European Conquest and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: The Moral Backwardness of International Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

tence reminds us of Hobbes' statement depicting the “life of man” in the state of nature as being “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”, and specifying that “the savage people in many places of America ... live at this day in that brutish manner”, all the more so since Locke, just as Hobbes, was influenced by the picture of American Indians transmitted to Europeans by European travellers and settlers from Christopher Columbus onwards. However, there is a second sentence, which makes all the difference between Locke and Hobbes. According to Locke, the American Indians provide “a pattern of the first ages in Asia and Europe”. In other words, Locke posited the existence of a kind of teleological progress of mankind towards some end of history, and along this historical evolution, he estimated that European entities had made more progress than non-European ones.

By establishing a distinction between domestic societies acknowledging the right to private property and societies ignorant of this institution, as well as by establishing a hierarchy favourable to the first and detrimental to the second, Locke summed up the then prevailing solidarist—rather than pluralist— conception of international society whose concrete substance was twofold:

- international society actually was limited to Europe because only European states shared the same values,
- Europeans had the right and the duty to show non-European entities the way to progress by diffusing their values – in his case the institution of private property.

As such, Locke was representative of the typically Western “orientalist”³³ tradition, including thinkers from Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suarez to Karl Marx and J. S. Mill, according to which the world was divided in the European international society on the one hand, and the world beyond

³³ E. Said, *Orientalism*, London, Vintage Books, 1979.

the line of this European international society on the other, or, put differently, between 'us' and 'them', accompanied by a way of looking at 'them' not as they actually were or as they perceived themselves, but as 'we' liked 'them' to be. In this way, the non-European peoples were successively perceived as heathens during the Spanish Age of the first 'discoveries', as savages during the French Age of the conquest mainly of North America and as uncivilised during the British Age of the imperialist penetration into Africa and Asia.

The overall behaviour of the Spaniards, the French and the British toward the indigenous peoples they encountered during their conquests was of course variable: the Spaniards proceeded with subjugation, the French with integration and the British with extermination³⁴. The legitimating juridical framework embedding their military conquests, territorial occupation, economic exploitation and political dominance evolved throughout the centuries: in the Spanish Age, natural law was appealed to in order to justify the necessity of converting the heathens to Christianity; in the French Age, the public law of Europe provided the legal framework of the Europeans' right to appropriate the non-cultivated lands —*terra nullius*— of Indian tribes; in the British Age, international law aiming at promoting the “common welfare of all civilized nations”³⁵ was invoked when the Ottoman Empire, China and Japan were forced to adopt the standard of civilization before being admitted to the family of nations³⁶. But beyond these specificities, one common point cha-

³⁴ See A. Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993.

³⁵ J. Bentham, quoted in W. Grewe, *The Epochs of International Law*, *op. cit.*, p. 450.

³⁶ For a synthetic analysis of the European powers' relations with non-European entities, see C. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (1950), New York, Telos Press, 2003, as well as W. Grewe, *The Epochs of International Law*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2000. G. Gong, *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984, provides a thorough analysis of Britain's policy towards the Ottoman, Japanese and Chinese empires at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth, centuries.

racterised the whole set of interactions between European powers and entities beyond the line: conceived of as different, they were treated differently.

In the domain of peace and war, there was “no peace beyond the line”, to quote Sir Francis Drake: whereas in Europe war was conceived of as an ultima ratio, resorted to once diplomacy had failed and used to resolve conflict of interests between *justi hostes* recognising each other’s right to exist independently as sovereign units, resort to violence was the prima ratio, the normal instrument, when Europeans dealt with non-Europeans; whereas Europeans within their mutual interactions forbade themselves to invoke religious differences as legitimate motives to intervene in other states’ domestic affairs, they justified their interventions overseas by referring to, precisely, the differences separating the entities concerned from the level of faith, reason or civilization they themselves had reached. Non-Europeans did not deserve to be treated on the basis of European norms for two reasons:

- first, as they did not share European values and as they did not behave like members of the international society, Grotian norms regulating warfare could not apply during their encounters with Europeans;
- secondly, as they were potential members of the enlarging international society, they first had to be forced to adopt Lockean values via Hobbesian means. As asserted by J.S Mill, who was not merely a philosopher but also a director of the British East India Company, “barbarians have no rights as a nation, except a right to such treatment as may fit them for becoming one”³⁷.

The term “barbarian” used by Mill is anything but fortuitous. The conception of a world divided in a cosmos organised by norms and a chaos regulated by warfare actually goes back to Antiquity, when the Greeks distinguis-

³⁷ J.S. Mill, quoted in W. Grewe, *The Epochs of International Law*, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

hed *stasis*, limited quarrels between Greek city-states, from *polemos*, unlimited wars of annihilation between Greeks and the Persian empire, constructed as The Barbarian. For some two millennia, given the overall autonomy of pre-Westphalian entities, that is to say the self-sufficiency of the then prevailing empires, the issue of how to deal concretely with Barbarians was raised only very exceptionally, for instance during the Roman encounters with Germanic or Celtic tribes, or the Chinese encounters with Tatars and Mongols. The rest of the time, empires were separated and protected from the outside world thanks to the erection of physical as well as symbolic walls – the Roman *limes* and Hadrian's Wall, the Great Wall of China. Once, however, the technological evolution permitted Europeans to sail across the oceans and settle overseas, this vision of the world as a dichotomy was translated into a Hobbesian relationship contrasting with the Lockean culture prevailing in the European society: while forming a society of states in Europe, the European powers formed a “society of empires”³⁸ when dealing with non-European entities.

Our claim is that since the end of the Cold War, the “empire of civilization”³⁹ is back in town, as a consequence of the revival of the solidarist conception of international society due to America's rereading of the UN Charter and its capacity to spread its liberal values, if necessary via military means. In other words, the material unipolarity of the post-Cold War interstate system results in a normative uniformity of the post-Cold War international society.

Throughout the Cold War, the international society institutionalised in the United Nations was fairly pluralist, as mentioned above in our presentation of Bull's theory: “What was long denied even to states (sovereign equa-

³⁸ P. Keal, *European Encounters with Indigenous Peoples*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

³⁹ B. Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

lity) was now granted to peoples (external self-determination). The distinction between civilized and non-civilized peoples had been finally abandoned, ... and democracy was left as a desideratum rather than a genuine prerequisite of admission to the society of states"⁴⁰. The liberal internationalism that underpinned the UN Charter transposed "onto the international stage core liberal ideas of the legal equality of the individual before the law, the individual's rights to liberty and self-determination, and the inviolability of the individual's physical person. The state becomes the individual 'writ large', bearing the right of sovereignty (*qua* individual liberty) within a putative international society"⁴¹. The existence of the bipolar rivalry with the Soviets, the presence of a socialist counter-model, the rise of the Third World and also the anti-colonialist ideology put forward by the US because of its own past, contribute to explain the retreat of the traditional Western paternalism. America's position, however, was ambiguous, if not schizophrenic, as the Wilsonian idea of a world safe for democracies had not been abandoned: on the one hand American authorities shared in the working of the universal UN institutions based on the pluralist principle of equal sovereignty; on the other hand they entertained privileged relationships with the sole liberal democracies in regional organisations based on the solidarist principle of liberal identity, from the IMF to the GATT and NATO.

The end of the Cold War, synonymous with the decline of socialist and anti-colonialist values, permitted the US to "reinvent a restrictive international society"⁴² based on common values rather than on common interests, thanks to a revisited liberalism stressing freedom instead of equality, that is, freedom to intervene in others' domestic affairs instead of equality

⁴⁰ G. Simpson, *Great Powers and Outlaw States: Unequal Sovereigns in the International Legal Order*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 276.

⁴¹ C. Reus-Smit, "Liberal Hierarchy and the Licence to Use Force", *Review of International Studies*, 31 (1), January 2005, p. 71-92.

⁴² I. Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 180.

among sovereign peers, and progress towards a desirable end, actually liberal democracy, rather than tolerate differences. Admittedly, the formal expansion of the international society went on: for instance, a condition was put to the UN membership of the states born from the dismantling of the USSR, Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia. Substantively however, liberal democracy, human rights and free market economy progressively turned out to be to the “new standard of civilization”⁴³ of the so-called international community, first and foremost in Europe where, in order to be admitted as new member states of the European Union, states of the former Soviet bloc had to adopt the so-called Copenhagen criteria: “Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union”.

The distinction made between insiders —those states that accept the model of the liberal democracy embodied by the US and the EU— and outsiders⁴⁴, that is, all the other ones, including Fareed Zakaria's “illiberal democracies”⁴⁵ or Freedom House's “partly free states”⁴⁶, led to new world divisions reminding the ideology of the line of pre-Westphalian or, better, extra-Westphalian pasts. Indirectly inspired by Fukuyama's end-of-history

⁴³ J. Donnelly, “Human rights: a new standard of civilization?”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 74 (1), January 1998, p. 1-24.

⁴⁴ See C. Hobson, “Democracy as Civilization”, *Global Society*, 22 (1), January 2008, p. 75-95.

⁴⁵ F. Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”, *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (6), November-December 1997, p. 22-43.

⁴⁶ F. In its annual 'Freedom in the World Report', the non-governmental organization Freedom House distinguishes free, partly free, and not free countries. See its website <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>

scenario, academics such as Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky proposed a tale of two worlds, “zones of peace” *versus* “zones of turmoil”⁴⁷, whereas according to pundits such as Robert Cooper, adviser of Tony Blair during the nineties before counselling the European Commission, the international scene is divided in a post-modern world mainly represented by the EU, a modern world composed by powers still resorting to *Realpolitik*, and a pre-modern world to which belong the various failed and collapsed states from Haiti and Liberia to Somalia and Afghanistan⁴⁸. Last but not least, John Rawls, one of America's greatest political theorists, went as far as distinguishing five types of societies: reasonable liberal peoples, decent hierarchical ones, outlaw states, burdened societies and benevolent absolutisms⁴⁹.

The most interesting category of Rawls' taxonomy is the outlaw state, characterised by the fact that it violates human rights internally and does not want to comply with appropriate norms of conduct on the international scene. This outlaw state, called rogue state by American administrations from Clinton to George W. Bush, is the liberal democracies' other and its ontological barbarian, because of its non-democratic regime, and its behavioural barbarian, because of its violation of basic norms of appropriate conduct, its “barbarian from within”⁵⁰ to put it bluntly. While being formally admitted as a member of the international society, it is substantively excluded from the international community equated with the family of Western liberal democracies. When dealing with such outlaw or rogue states, liberal democracies do not hesitate to practice double standards, as emphasised by Cooper in an article significantly called “Why We Still Need Empires”:

47 M. Singer & A Wildavsky, *The Real World Order: Zones of Peace, Zones of Turmoil*, London, Chatham House, 1993.

48 R. Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Centuries*, New York, Grove/The Atlantic Monthly Press, 2004.

49 J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1999.

50 R.-P. Droit, *Généalogie des barbares*, Paris, O. Jacob, 2007, p. 183.

“The post-modern world has to start to get used to double standards. Among ourselves, we operate on the basis of laws and open cooperative security. But, when dealing with old-fashioned states outside the post-modern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era: force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary to deal with those who still live in the nineteenth century world of every state for itself. Among ourselves, we keep the law but when we are operating in the jungle, we must also use the laws of the jungle”⁵¹. A comparable advice is given by John Rawls: writing about outlaw states that violate human rights internally although they “are not aggressive and do not harbor plans to attack their neighbors”, he refers to a society akin to the Aztecs practicing human sacrifices and suggests that “they must be made to realize that without honoring human rights, their participation in a system of social cooperation is simply impossible”, before concluding that military intervention “might be called for” if human rights violations become egregious⁵².

Cooper and Rawls' quotes can obviously be applied as such to describe the “mission civilisatrice”⁵³-rationale behind the policing wars fought by the US and its allies against Milosevic' Yugoslavia in 1995 and 1999, Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 2003 and Gaddafi's Libya in 2011: whether these interventions were decided unilaterally, as in Kosovo and Iraq, or multilaterally, as in Bosnia or Libya, they were undertaken by “democracy makers”⁵⁴ claiming to act on behalf of the international community, but actually representative of an updated version of Christianity, Enlightenment, and Civilization in their respective relations with pagan, savage and uncivilized entities.

⁵¹ R. Cooper, “Why We Still Need Empires”, *The Observer*, April 7th, 2002.

⁵² J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, *op. cit.*, p. 93-94.

⁵³ R. Paris, “International Peacebuilding and the 'Mission Civilisatrice'”, *Review of International Studies*, 28 (4), 2002, p. 637-656.

⁵⁴ N. Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers: Human Rights and International Order*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005.

5. Towards a new order?

What about the future? Will the contemporary order go on prevailing? How is it likely to evolve? Given our neoclassical outlook positing that material factors—relative to the interstate structure—prevail over normative factors—relative to international society—in the emergence of world orders, we have to start with a prospective analysis of the potential evolution of the current configuration of powers and, in order to do so, we have to go back to the afore-mentioned statistics.

As recalled above, in 2011 the Chinese GNP corresponds to a bit less than 50% of the American GNP, and therefore the contemporary system is unipolar. If now we take into account the chronological evolution of China's GNP for the last two decades, the overwhelming conclusion likely to be drawn is that, sooner or later, the Chinese GNP will match America's economic resources, everything else being equal: indeed, the Chinese GNP expressed in current prices at the official exchange rate in US Dollars, while representing 48.3% of America's GNP in 2001, represented merely 6.8% in 1991, 10.9% in 1996, 12.9% in 2001, and 20.3% in 2006. Put differently, China's growth is accelerating the more China is developing its economic basis⁵⁵, and thus China will be America's next peer competitor or, to use the concept proposed by Kenneth Organski, America's contender.

It will even be America's first contender, in the historical sense of the word 'first', given that the USSR was basically a poor power, with huge military resources developed on a weak economic basis, which is the ultimate reason why the USSR lost the Cold War, just as World War One revealed Tsarist Russia to be but a giant with feet of clay. China, on the contrary, is

⁵⁵ The figures are calculated on the basis of IMF data to be found on <http://www.imf.org/external/data.htm>

growing economically at an impressive rate, and it will be a serious challenge to America's primacy precisely because it has not committed the mistake of dedicating a too important part of its economic richness to military expenditures. This being said, we may bet that sooner or later Beijing will be tempted to bring its political and strategic ambitions into line with its economic dynamism, and the most recent figures, according to which China is about to significantly increase its military budget, as well as China's new maritime ambitions, tend to corroborate this hypothesis. In this case, the unipolar structure would undergo a significant change and give way to a transition or parity phase which, according to Gilpin and Organski, implies higher risks of instability and, ultimately, of war. The argument goes as follows.

According to Gilpin and Organski, a unipolar structure is doomed to decline, as sooner or later the dominant hegemon will be unable to go on managing the system successfully. First of all because of the economic law of the uneven growth: as by definition the dominant power has entered the growth cycle before other states, it is bound to be the first to be confronted with slower growth rates, whereas at the same moment the secondary powers, which have entered the growth cycle later than the dominant nation, are booming economically. Furthermore, as the stability of the international system also depends on the preponderant power's capacity to prevent any minor power from challenging the existing rules that govern the smooth functioning of the system, the dominant nation is exposed to imperial overstretch. As a matter of fact, it has to invest an important part of its budgetary resources in military spending in order to finance its military engagements: as this military burden is unproductive from an economic standpoint, it contributes to the economic decline of the preponderant nation, all the more so since at the same time, the smaller powers which, by definition, have no international engagements, can focus all their financial resources on the growth of their economies.

Over time thus, the power distribution within the international system is changing: it is no longer characterised by unipolarity, but by parity, which according to Kenneth Organski exists when a rising secondary power becomes a contender, that is to say develops at least 80% of the amount of material resources held by the dominant power. Whereas balance of power theorists claim that an equality (= balance) of resources is the most frequent feature of the distribution of power in the international system and, above all, assert that such an equality is a condition of stability, power cycle scholars, on the contrary, assert that a system characterised by an approximately equal distribution of resources between two great states (= parity) is a rare transition period, and an exceptionally war-prone period. More precisely, in a transition period, due to the prospective overtaking of the —relatively— declining dominant nation by the rising dominated state, the probability of war is increasing when the rising power is a dissatisfied, or revisionist, power. If the rising challenger is a satisfied state, that is to say a liberal democratic state today because of the USA's domestic regime and values, a peaceful transition is imaginable, as by definition a satisfied state accepts the existing rules established to find peaceful resolutions to the conflicts generated by diverging interests. But if the rising state is a dissatisfied challenger, then war is likely to break out *via* two types of processes:

- war can occur directly, because of the preventive motivation for war of the declining power: perceiving the prospective consequences of its decreasing military capacities relative to those of its rising adversary, the declining hegemonic power resorts to arms in order to fight a war under relatively favourable conditions to block its adversary's further rise and to avoid the worsening of the status quo over time and the risk of having to fight a war under less favourable circumstances later – this happened during the Peloponnesian War;
- war can break out indirectly, because the aggressive behaviour of the rising challenger compels the dominant power to resort to armed vio-

lence in an attempt to stop its adversary's expansionism, in order to remain at the top of the world. In this hypothesis, an initially limited war performed by the rising challenger leads to a general war because of the defensive military interference of the declining dominant power, desirous to maintain the stability of the international system and the existing hierarchical order. This process triggered the outbreak of the First and Second World Wars because of Great Britain's obligation to go to war in order to try to maintain its declining preponderance against an expansionist Germany resorting to arms against Serbia in 1914 (because of its alliance with Austria) and against Poland in 1939.

The war that results from the dynamics of power in the interstate system is not only a major war, but also a "hegemonic war", defined by Gilpin as a war "that determines which state will be dominant and will govern the system"⁵⁶. This state, able to establish a new system, with new rules, norms and institutions aimed at and succeeding in stabilising the system, is rarely the rising challenger, usually defeated during the war by the coalition of the satisfied powers:

- either it is a third state that benefits from the exhaustion of the powers engaged in the hegemonic war: for instance the Macedonians profited from the long-term consequences of the Peloponnesian War, which weakened the winners and not only the losers, the Spartans as much as the Athenians;
- or it is the most powerful state within the alliance of the satisfied powers, for whom the hegemonic war is a kind of windfall profit, because of the declining preponderant power's growing incapacity to

⁵⁶ R. Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 15. Gilpin's definition of hegemonic war is directly influenced by R. Aron's usage of the concept, see R. Aron, *La société industrielle et la guerre* (1957), in R. Aron, *Les sociétés modernes* (edited by S. Paugam), Paris, PUF, 2006, p. 801-851.

go on governing the system despite of its victory during the hegemonic war – this is what happened after the two world wars, permitting the US to become the new hegemonic power it still is today.

If we postulate that this scenario will be repeated in the future, two strategies are then possible from an American point of view:

- a first strategy would consist in trying to contribute to transform China into a kind of democratic, satisfied power, unlikely to try to change the existing order by resorting to force: this strategy hinges upon a liberal view of international politics focusing on the democratic peace theory⁵⁷;
- a second, alternative strategy would consist in ignoring the potential domestic evolution of China and containing its rise by creating a kind of quarantine line all around it, in order to, thanks to already existing regional alliances and new coalitions to come, notably with India, impede any expansion of China in East and South Asia and its ensuing rise to a regional hegemon: this strategy is based on a realist view of international politics focusing on traditional *Realpolitik*.

Both strategies should logically have a concrete impact on the contemporary policing wars, likely to be progressively dropped, not merely because of the minor importance of the states concerned when compared to the challenge awaiting the contemporary order, but also because of their perverse consequences on the likely evolution of this order:

- the first consequence concerns imperial overstretch: by committing themselves in a multiplicity of armed interventions, the Western powers eventually exhaust their forces because the necessary expen-

⁵⁷ On democratic peace theory, see, notably, M. Brown et al (eds), *Debating the Democratic Peace: An International Security Reader*, Cambridge (Mass.), the MIT Press, 1996.

- ditures contribute to weaken their economic growth, thus accelerating their relative decline compared to the rise of the dynamic challenger China;
- the second consequence refers to imperial hubris: by intervening, Western powers misuse their strength or, at least, are likely to be perceived by regional dissatisfied powers as misusing their strength, thus encouraging these states to adopt a balancing behaviour which a more benevolent hegemony would avoid;
 - the third consequence is relative to the loss of soft power: soft power being as important an asset as hard power, the US and Western democracies are accepted as hegemonic leaders also because of the attractiveness of their ideas, political regime, way of life etc. and, conversely, the lack of attractiveness of alternative models; by misusing their strength in trying to export democracy at the point of bayonets, Western powers contradict their own values and, indirectly, contribute to make Non-Western models attractive.

Whatever the strategy chosen to try to cope with China's rise, and whether the international society will ebb back to its pluralist version or whether it will stick to its post-Cold War solidarist mood, we can await the contemporary unipolar system to transform in a new great game with East Asia as the core of the world politics to come. ■

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In this paper, the author puts forward a neo-classical realist analysis of the contemporary world order as a one-dimensional world. The main argument consists in claiming that some twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the material structure of the international system, considered to be the independent variable, is characterized by unipolarity, while the normative nature of the international society, considered to be the intermediate variable, is uniform. This double hierarchy, in favor of the US and its allies, concerning both its economic and military power resources and the values underpinning norms of appropriate behavior, explains the most characteristic features of the post-Cold War world order considered to be the dependent variable: on the one hand the prevalence of neoliberal norms reflects the material superiority of Western powers, on the other hand the supremacy of the US is legitimized and reproduced by the neo-liberal norms regulating the institutionalized international political game. Stable in the short term, this order is likely to evolve in the long run, due to the rise of China as America's future contender and of East Asia as the core of the world order to come.

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