

A NEW ORDER, NEW POWERS

Werner Weidenfeld

The war with Iraq has been a turning point in history that will bring massive changes to America's relations with the rest of the world and relations within Europe. Future historians will characterize the time period between the attack on the World Trade Center and the Iraqi war as the beginning of a new era in the history of the world. They will see the end of the East-West conflict as the incubation period for the full consequences that were not reducible to one concept by its contemporaries. Unsurprisingly, the political response worldwide has been erratic and confused, reflected in the intellectual commentary. The war exposed a lack of orientation. Where it was once fashionable to speak of a paradigm change, one now soberly acknowledges paradigm atrophy.

The demands of our era are too high; too much must be resolved in too many places, and too many previously legitimate assumptions appear to have become irrelevant. Almost everything that seemed to lend world politics the image of a reasonably reliable order is no longer valid. The Iraqi war presents seven consequences for the future of international politics.

In the beginning there was terror. This is not to say that everything is a consequence of terrorism, but the attacks of 11 September released forces, triggered traumas, and made us all look into the abyss of serious dangers previously off in the distance where they were more or less ignored.

The end of the Cold War and the dissipation of communist ideology and its goal of world domination left smoldering conflicts in the background. Phenomena such as religious fundamentalism, the explosion of ethnic tensions, and heated nationalism, which has been contained for so long within the grip of bipolarity, were then suddenly set free, surprising the world community with this new

aggressiveness, from the Balkans to the Caucasus, Afghanistan to Pakistan, Iraq to Indonesia and Malaysia.

The second consequence is that terrorism has undermined the premise of our security. The basic principle against terrorism has always been deterrence. An enemy state was to be deterred from attacking with the threat of a counterattack resulting in destruction or at least defeat. Every actor's move was based on the rationally calculated risk of a counterattack. This ensured peace in the Cold War world for decades.

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However, the global professional network of terrorism does not act according to this principle. Its calculations are not based upon this traditional sense of risk, as divine promises are made.

Terrorism is no longer the classic foreign enemy. It lies both within and beyond the borders of the country under attack. Terrorist networks boast a high level of professional training and are well equipped with high-tech capabilities, which are often linked to a transcendence-oriented conviction to bring a new cultural horizon to designated nations. Terrorism has nested itself in many countries, effectively rescinding the traditional distinction between domestic and foreign security. Western societies, particularly the United States, have therefore replaced deterrence with the active search for protection.

In recent years alone, some ninety thousand terrorists worldwide have been trained. The nightmare of 11 September was, against the backdrop of this information, just the beginning of the beginning. Western civilization is facing threats to its very existence.

America's ability to survive terrorism is the third consequence. Rendered vulnerable for the first time on its own territory, on 11 September the United States was struck at the very heart of its existence. Practically defenseless against attack, the American self-conception made war against terrorism necessary to protect the survival of the nation. That is why the war with Iraq should not be seen as a singular event. It is only one stone, with many more needed to complete the large mosaic of security and stability. First, there was Afghanistan, then Iraq, and others will follow—Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Korea; wherever the roots of threats are found, America will seek to protect its national existence. Should organizations such as the United Nations or NATO wish to be of help, Washington will welcome them; however, should the solidarity of international organizations not bear support for it, Washington will manage it alone. The same goes for international law. When useful, the United States will follow it, but when not, one can go without appealing to its legitimacy. The vital interest of securing America's existence has priority above all else.

The fourth consequence is that the United States and Europe's respective basic perceptions of risks and threats to their national security are drifting further apart. This huge divide could lead, at some point, to a rupture in transatlantic culture. To be sure, the common roots of an enlightened society, principles of freedom and reason have not simply withered. A close transatlantic economic relationship and social interconnection continue to be important, but they are strained more and more by dissent over the use of military force by the United States. America guaranteed its European allies sanctuary, which soothed the European soul wounded by two world wars. However, when two societies respond so differently to the key challenges to their basic security, the partnership erodes,

and it is only a question of time before the relationship collapses. The end of the old Atlantic community is at hand.

As for its perception of the rest of the world, the fifth consequence is that the only remaining superpower is prepared to fully realize its hegemonic status. A natural reflex to this has been its attempt to build temporary coalitions that relativize and curb its domination. Only this can explain the current curious alliance between France, Germany, Russia, and China. Within it, each partner has its own interests:

- France sees the chance to bring itself back into the circle of world powers. It is realistic enough to recognize that its strength alone is not enough. France needs partners, even if that means working with an estranged Germany, which can only be considered a junior partner in world political affairs at best.
- Germany senses the need to avert the danger of a German *Sonderweg*. For historical reasons, Germany requires the anchor of friendly relations more so than other nations. After having estranged itself from old partners, in particular the United States, Germany must forge new alliances. Working together with France, Russia, and China, it can combine the current moods and attitudes of multilateralism, pacifism, and anti-Americanism to its advantage at the voting booth.
- Russia is trapped in ambivalent behavior. On the one hand, wounded by the loss of its superpower status, Russia seeks to benefit from a close relationship with the United States. On the other hand, too close a relationship with Washington threatens to destroy what remains of Russia's weight in world political affairs. Russia's claims of solidarity with America were a welcome diversion from domestic attention to Chechnya. However, when core elements of national pride and world political interests are at stake, Moscow knows how to define and claim its own position.
- China is the only power that in the midterm could meet the United States eye to eye. However, it needs a prudent policy that will keep its neighbors from becoming ticking time bombs through U.S. actions. The aggravation of the Indian-Pakistan conflict is one such example. This applies as well to a policy toward North Korea, which could force Japan to become a nuclear power.

Considered together, all four partners share the interest of deflating the world's only superpower's magnetism, albeit for different reasons. America's hegemony is to be tamed through the alliance of a counter power.

The sixth consequence is America's response to this change in the constellation with a cooperation strategy à la carte. It seeks out specific countries, attracting them with the alluring promises of business and prestige, even at the risk of

damaging such international organizations as NATO, the European Union, and the United Nations. Regarding the EU, the classic strategy of “divide and conquer” has been employed, the symbolic highlight thereof being the letter of solidarity with the United States, signed by eight European states. This piece of paper became a document of the division of Europe. America will honor this document at best with wistful nostalgia, as its basic interests lie elsewhere in the main sources of energy supplies. These markets of the future lie beyond Europe.

The most relevant and potentially dangerous nations with respect to questions of security are in Asia and the Middle East. The political arm of Islamic fundamentalism is based on the Arabian Peninsula. The threat of nuclear arms was an issue in the Indian-Pakistan conflict. It is an issue in Iran, in the Middle East generally, and in North Korea. The time when America needed to protect its primary interests in Europe is gone.

The final consequence is how deeply America’s behavior and the war with Iraq have divided Europe. It would be naïve to assume that the historical successes of European integration will continue. The process of European integration can also fail. The war with Iraq has given rise to basic existential questions, to which European states have reacted with recourse according to their diverse national dispositions. Europe has no common perception of war and peace—each nation’s own historical trauma is too different to permit such a shared basis. Europeans consistently pursue individual national courses alongside their respective relationship to the United States, which explains why Eastern and Central European states are giving in to the magnetism of America’s market and power. It also explains why British prime minister Tony Blair and Spain’s José María Aznar compensate for their limited influence in continental Europe by positioning themselves at the shoulders of the United States and its political and economic prowess.

In the long-term, most importantly, trust among Europeans is being torn asunder. That letter signed by eight countries was an act prepared and carried out in the style of old-time secret diplomacy. Who should trust whom? Should Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder still trust Azner? Should President Jacques Chirac continue to have faith in Blair? Should France and Germany stand together against Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in European politics? The virus of distrust threatens to corrode Europe internally.

Considered together, these points illustrate why it is so difficult to understand clearly and interpret our present situation. There are power conglomerates of a dimension heretofore unknown, societies have become more vulnerable than ever, and the previous world order has become an anarchy of conflicts. The great dramas of human history are apparently still to be written. The reliability of our peaceful experience is a thing of the past.