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THE RISE -OR FALL- OF MULTILATERALISM: AMERICA'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR EUROPE

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THE RISE--OR FALL?--OF MULTILATERALISM: AMERICA'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR EUROPE

Ronald D. Asmus*

The paradoxical impact of the end of the Cold War is that it simultaneously vindicated American purpose and past policies yet forced a rethinking of the assumptions that guided U.S. foreign policy for nearly half a century. While liberating the United States from its overriding concern with the Soviet threat, the end of the Cold War has also compelled Americans to again confront core issues concerning definitions of our national interests and our role in the world. The result has been an expanding debate over American national security strategy in the post-Cold War world. Although President Clinton is often criticized for not having a cogent foreign policy, the Administration has indeed sought to define and implement a new conceptual framework around the principles of "multilateralism."

The degree to which it succeeds or fails has enormous implications for the American role in and attitude toward Europe and European security institutions. The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, it summarizes the parameters of the post-Cold War debate within the United States over future American national security strategy. Second, it lays out the Clinton Administration's attempts to define and implement a new foreign policy around the principles of multilateralism--and the problems and criticism that attempt has encountered. Third, it focuses on the implications of these trends for Europe and American attitudes toward European security institutions.

THE END OF THE COLD WAR CONSENSUS

The political beauty of the Cold War consensus governing our national security strategy was that it brought together under a single roof disparate traditions in American strategic thinking. Geopoliticians,

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realists, liberal internationalists--all could unite behind the twin intellectual pillars of containment and deterrence in the face of what was seen by the elite--and accepted by the public--as the Soviet threat. The collapse of communism and the unraveling of the USSR has eroded that unifying element in American national security thinking.

The result has been a burgeoning debate over two distinct yet intertwined sets of issues. The first concerns the nature of the international system following the end of the Cold War. The second concerns the role the United States should play in that system. Different definitions of American national interests and perceptions of what the desired American role is flow naturally from differing assumptions on the nature of international politics and the possible threats that could arise to those interests.

Perhaps the most important fault line divides those who advocate a narrow view of American national interests versus those who promote a value-driven definition of American interests. To be sure, a tension has, of course, always existed in American foreign policy between the sober pursuit of power politics and the more idealistic promotion of universal values and democracy. The Cold War consensus, however, allowed these two traditions to coexist without policymakers having to worry much about whether we were containing the USSR for geopolitical balance of power considerations or for moral ideological reasons. In practice, the rhetoric of American policy often leaned more toward the internationalist school whereas the actual practice of American diplomacy was often dominated by realist considerations.

This old divide has reemerged in the wake of the end of the Cold War. The collapse of communism has revealed the fault line between those for whom the Cold War was only about containing Soviet power, and those for whom it was also a struggle for democracy. In the eyes of the former, the collapse of communism and the unraveling of the USSR means that the U.S. can retreat to a more traditional balance of power stance with U.S. national security strategy primarily concerned about maintaining American sovereignty, strategic flexibility and options, and preventing the emergence of a new hegemon threatening their definition of U.S. vital interests. In the eyes of the latter, the new task is to

foster democracy and expand multilateral institutions and cooperation and to build an expanded and more effective system of collective security in a changing and increasingly interdependent world.

To be sure, there are a good number of gradations between both camps as a function of the relative weights that should be attached to these goals. Moreover, American foreign policy has always sought to find a middle ground between these two intellectual poles. Finding this new middle ground, however, may be much more difficult in the future as different understandings of American interests clash and compete for political preeminence, and as the downsizing of the defense budget forces policymakers to confront new issues and trade-offs.

There are four schools of thought in the current strategic debate. The first school promotes isolationism. Its leitmotifs are domestic renewal and strategic independence. This school claims that America's Cold War internationalist strategy has warped our sense of national interest and has justified American involvement and entanglement in areas and issues of marginal utility to the United States while eroding America's wealth and prosperity.

Proponents of this school firmly see calls for preserving "global stability," a "new world order," or the pursuit of democracy as slippery slopes to new commitments and entanglements in the world which will only further burden the United States. In the words of Ted Galen Carpenter, director of foreign policy studies at the CATO Institute, goals such as "global stability" or "democratization" fail the test of solvency. In Carpenter's words:

> It is unlikely that either objective is attainable at a reasonable cost, and it is even less likely that a hyperactivist U.S. role can bring about such utopias. . . Each would entangle the United States in a morass of regional, local, and even internecine conflicts throughout the world; and more often than not, each would involve the United States in conflicts that have little or no relevance to America's own vital security interests. *Washington would become either the social worker or the policeman of the planet—or, in a worst case scenario, it would seek to play both roles. The United States will find itself with even more political and military*

burdens than it endured throughout the Cold War. (emphasis added)[1]

The strategic alternative such isolationists offer is the classic agenda of realism and strategic independence. At the heart of a policy of strategic independence is a fundamental change in America's most important alliance relations and the liberation from American commitments in both Europe and Asia. The United States, they insist, is blessed with an unusual amount of geopolitical security rooted in geography. They argue, therefore, that forces in the world responsible for instability are unlikely to make the United States the object of their enmity unless we involve ourselves in their disputes.

The second school promotes selective unilateralism. Its leitmotif is power--the preservation of America's strategic advantage after the Cold War and prevention of the emergence of strategic challengers. While it, too, places a high emphasis on preserving strategic independence, it also believes that the United States has global interests. It sees the United States as the sole superpower in the post-Cold War world and it promotes a hard-headed approach to defend American sovereignty and maintain our strategic advantage in the years ahead. In a nutshell, its proponents are opposed to abandoning any national sovereignty.

Unilateralists are deeply skeptical of collective security and the ability of multinational institutions like the United Nations to play an effective role in international security. Whereas isolationists advocate the abandonment of American-led alliance systems, unilateralists place a strong emphasis on maintaining strong bilateral ties with key actors and see U.S.-led alliance systems as crucial for maintaining a balance of power in important regions and preventing the emergence of new hegemons in those regions. Many are concerned about the power potential of a Japan or Germany and justify an ongoing American role in these regions as necessary to contain Japanese or German power.

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[1]See Ted Galen Carpenter, "The New World Disorder," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1991, p. 24.

Unilateralists are straightforward in acknowledging their opposition to multilateral or collective institutions. No nation, alliance, or institution, including the UN, they argue, should have a veto over the sovereign decisions of the U.S. government. Distrust of big government at home thus extends to distrust of large multilateral organizations such as the UN or IMF which are difficult for the United States to control. While shades of unilateralism can be found on both sides of the political aisle, such thinking is most clearly articulated among American conservatives. As Jeane Kirkpatrick put it: "It is accurate, I believe, to say that a conservative would not have designed and worked hard to realize the United Nations--though a good many voted to ratify the treaty. The UN embodies many of the characteristics least attractive to conservatives."[2]

The third school promotes multilateralism. Its leitmotif is interdependence. It sees international politics as having been transformed by the spread of democracy and the globalization of politics and economics. The security and welfare of Americans, they argue, can be affected as much by actions and decisions of actors beyond our borders as by domestic actors. This school sees the United States and its allies as having emerged from the Cold War with a strong sense of shared values, goals and institutions. It wants to build on that "strategic capital" and establish more effective means of cooperation in pursuit of common goals.

Multilateralists propose the expansion of a Western caucus within a global community. While the UN is seen as key, the preferred strategy is to expand Western regional alliances to deal with new and common problems. The United States would not fear a strong Europe or Japan, but rather would encourage them to assume a larger international security role as full partners in this new Western global caucus.

While proposing a new form of burden and power sharing with other Western democracies, this school sees the United States as having a unique ability to help shape the elements of the post-Cold war system. As the lead power in regional alliances, American leadership will be

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[2]Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, "Defining a Conservative Foreign Policy," *The Heritage Lectures*, No. 458, February 25, 1993.

required to transform them into new coalitions pursuing broader shared objectives. This, however, will also require a considerable retooling of traditional American thinking on such matters. As the authors of the recently issued Carnegie Endowment's National Commission report entitled *Changing Our Ways* wrote:

> Collective actions will also have costs. Working with others can be cumbersome and demanding. It is terribly difficult to build consensus and forge a common agenda among sovereign countries when there are differences in self-interest. The task is still more arduous with democracies whose governments--like ours are accountable to shifting public opinion . . .
>
> If we are to succeed with a new kind of leadership, we will sometimes have to yield a measure of the autonomy we have guarded so zealously during most of our history. It is not enough for the United States to say that we will pursue common goals on our own . . . The challenges of collective leadership will be especially demanding in the management of our relations with the other major powers. They feel freer to pursue their own agendas and are less willing to follow an American lead . . . Americans will need to change the way we think about the world and our role in it.[3]

The fourth school advocates a return to Wilsonian ideas of collective security. Its leitmotif is justice and the rule of law--right backed up by might. World peace is indivisible; and aggression against any nation is viewed as a threat to all nations. The international community must insure that aggression does not pay and, therefore, may employ the force it deems necessary and appropriate to enforce collective security.

Proponents of this school argue that the end of the Cold War has liberated the UN from its Cold War paralysis and opened a window of potential global reform and renewal. The United States, they insist, should have a special interest in collective security because of its privileged position in the UN and because the alternative would be for the United States to assume the role of the world's policeman. Collective security, they insist, may well be the only vehicle through

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[3]See *Changing Our Ways* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment National Commission, 1992), p. 13

which U.S. leadership can preserve world order at a cost tolerable to the American public.

THE NEW POLITICAL LINEUP

Even a quick look at American political parties reveals that the fault lines in the emerging American debate do not always or easily correlate with the existing political lineup. Realists do not always correspond neatly to Republicans and internationalist Wilsonians to Democrats. Such divisions, therefore, cut across both the old Cold War divides and party lines. Indeed, each of the two major parties in the United States has its own checkered foreign policy traditions as well as its own internal divisions.

In the 1930s, it was Republicans and conservatives who were most prone to represent isolationist, protectionist views, in large part as a counterpole to FDR's internationalist foreign policy. But anti-communism altered that by forcing together disparate G.O.P and conservative viewpoints into a steady anti-communist internationalism. Old-line conservatives, libertarian conservatives, religious conservatives and neo-conservatives all came together in their desire to counter the Soviet threat. The collapse of the communist threat, however, has caused the conservative movement to splinter along centrifugal lines of ideology and culture. Pat Buchanan's 1992 Presidential campaign was as much about new isolationist conservatism challenging postwar mainstream Republican foreign policy thinking as about domestic issues in the debate over the future of the conservative movement.

In many ways, former President Bush epitomized the union of the unilateralist and multilateralist traditions that underpinned the Cold War consensus. Former President Bush always emphasized the need for the United States to have the capability to act alone if it deemed such action necessary, yet he was also famous for the attention he devoted to maintaining America's alliances. Speaking at the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations in the spring of 1992, former Secretary of State James Baker rejected both the notion of the United States as a sole superpower

as well as what he termed "misplaced multilateralism." Looking back upon the Bush Administration's accomplishments, Baker concluded:

> In each case the pattern is clear: American leadership and engagement made collective action possible. We did not have to do it alone, but without us it could not have been done successfully. . .
>
> U.S. leadership of collective engagement avoids the dangerous extremes of either fallacious omnipotence or misplaced multilateralism. The United States is not the world's policeman. Yet we are not bystanders to our own fate.
>
> Obviously we can hardly entrust the future of democracy or American interests exclusively to multilateral institutions, nor should we. Of course, the United States reserves the right to act alone, which at times may be the only way to truly lead or serve our national interests.
>
> Ours is a pragmatic approach, a realistic approach, but also a principled approach--for it promotes those common values that are essential for a democratic peace. It is in this way that we build a new and better world order: U.S. leadership catalyzing collective action to protect and promote our core security, political, and economic values.[4]

If one American political party has been historically identified with the advocacy of internationalism, multilateralism, and collective security, it is the Democratic Party. Collective security was not only the watchword of Woodrow Wilson, but was continued by Franklin D. Roosevelt who ensured that collective security principles were espoused in the Atlantic Charter, in subsequent key statements on American war aims during the Second World War, and ultimately in the Charter of the United Nations itself. From the 1940s to the 1960s the Democrats were united around strong anti-communism coupled with a Rooseveltian international outlook. Vietnam fractured that consensus, creating new divisions between "Cold War liberal" anti-communists and "anti anti-communists," and set the party down a two-decade long path of internal divisions and political disadvantage with the American public because it perceived weaknesses in its national security and defense policies.

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[4]See Baker's speech before the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, April 21, 1992.

Although the collapse of communism potentially removed a source of internal division within the Democratic Party, the Gulf War and the debate over the use of force was a reminder that such historical divisions remained difficult to overcome.

The 1992 primary campaign also showed the Democratic candidates to be spread across the political map on foreign policy issues. The Democrats had their own contemporary version of "America first" in the "Come Home America" theme voiced by Tom Harkin and, even more stridently, by Jerry Brown (who, while the complete opposite of Pat Buchanan, nonetheless sounded a Buchananesque isolationist tone at times). More than any other of the Democratic candidates for President in 1992, Governor and subsequent President Bill Clinton based his campaign on an assertive internationalist and multilateralist foreign policy. Although foreign policy never became as major an issue as the country's domestic renewal, candidate Clinton repeatedly emphasized that domestic renewal and foreign policy reform had to go hand in hand and that domestic reform was a precondition for the United States to sustain an activist international role.

In each of the three major foreign policy speeches delivered during the Presidential campaign, candidate Clinton embraced an foreign agenda of moving the center of gravity in American foreign policy more firmly in the direction of promoting democratic values and multilateralism. Speaking in Milwaukee in October 1992, Clinton delivered his harshest critique of former President George Bush, accusing him of not being "at home in the mainstream pro-democracy tradition of American foreign policy" and of pursuing "a foreign policy that embraces stability at the expense of freedom." As Governor, Clinton then clearly rejected the "realist" tradition in American foreign policy:

> This approach to foreign policy is sometimes described as "power politics," to distinguish it from what some contend is sentimentalism and idealism of pro-democracy foreign policy. But in a world where freedom, not tyranny, is on the march, the cynical calculus of power politics simply does not compute. It is ill-suited to a new era in which ideas and information are broadcast around the world before ambassadors can read their cables. Simple reliance on old balance-of-power strategies cannot bring the same practical success as a foreign policy that draws more generously from the American

> democratic experience and ideals, and lights fires in the hearts of millions of freedom-loving people around the world.
>
> Military power still matters. And I am committed to maintaining a strong and ready defense. . . But power must be accompanied by clear purpose. . . Mr. Bush's ambivalence about supporting democracy, his eagerness to defend potentates and dictators, has shown itself time and time again. It has been a disservice not only to our democratic values, but also to our national interests. For in the long run, I believe that Mr. Bush's neglect of our democratic ideals abroad could do as much harm as our neglect of our economic needs at home.[5]

TOWARD A NEW MULTILATERALISM

Bill Clinton is the first post-Cold War President of the United States. Clinton and his foreign policy team have sought to implement the themes of a new multilateralist foreign policy articulated during the campaign, and in numerous speeches by Clinton and his foreign policy team since assuming office. The President and his advisors have repeatedly emphasized three pillars upon which their foreign policy rests: 1) elevating global economic growth as a primary foreign policy goal; 2) promoting the spread of democracy and free markets; and 3) updating America's security arrangements and armed forces to meet new threats.

In practice, this has meant, first and foremost, a domestic reform agenda coupled with a foreign economic strategy aimed at strengthening the global trading system. Clinton has made American economic recovery and the nation's economic security his top political priority. While emphasizing the need for America to get its own economic house in order, the President has firmly embraced multilateralism in his international economic policy. Since large budget deficits inhibit any significant use of fiscal policy to stimulate the economy, with the overhang of private and corporate debt simultaneously limiting the potential use of monetary policy, the Clinton team has made international trade strategy an integral part of America's overall growth strategy.

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[5]See Remarks by Governor Bill Clinton, "American Foreign Policy and the Democratic Ideal," Pabst Theatre, Milwaukee, WI, October 1, 1992. Author's private copy.

The clearest example of Clinton's commitment to these goals at the core of his national security strategy was reflected in his high-risk effort to obtain congressional passage of NAFTA and a successful conclusion to the Uruguay round of the GATT talks. Similarly, Clinton's commitment to the second pillar of his foreign policy, namely the promotion of democracy, can be seen in the Administration's commitment to aiding the democratic transition in Russia which has been elevated one of the top priorities in Clinton's foreign policy.

The most difficult and contentious component of Clinton's multilateralism has been the Administration's efforts to, first, multilateralize American military strategy and, second, to update regional alliances for the post-Cold War era. The debate over the former has centered on "How Little is Enough?" for the post-Cold war era; whether multilateralism reduces American strategic independence in unacceptable ways; whether to support peace operations; on a renewed debate over the circumstances and purposes when American armed forces should be used; and, finally, on the issue of command over U.S. forces in multinational operations. The debate over enhancing collective security and updating regional alliances for the post-Cold War era has, in turn, centered on a new commitment to the United Nations. Both during the Presidential campaign and while in office, President Clinton has backed an expansive idea of UN peacemaking. Although the details have never been published, the review of American multilateral diplomacy--Presidential Decision Directive 13 and the accompanying Presidential Review Document 13--are reported to envision a significant expansion of American involvement in UN efforts such as permanent assignment of U.S. troops for UN efforts and intelligence sharing.

While this debate was and is, first and foremost, an internal American debate, it centers on core issues of American interests and the appropriate means to pursue those interests--issues which have obvious and profound implications for Europe. Europe has also played a role in several other regards. Indeed, in the eyes of the new multilateralists, Europe and the U.S.-European relationship was *the* testing ground for building a new multilateralist strategy with Europe as *the* natural partner for the United States in the post-Cold War world. A principal

premise of multilateralism was that the alliances and habits born of the Cold War would provide the foundations for an expanded and shared agenda and strategy between these power centers to address the challenges of the post-Cold War era. No two parts of the world seemed more interdependent, more used to working with one another, and more capable of defining such a shared agenda than America and Europe.

Moreover, after the Cold War, the American public seemed willing to embrace a multilateralist foreign policy. Public opinion polling conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the Americans Talk Security Foundation in the late 1980s and early 1990s documented a shift in favor of institutions like the United Nations and acting together with allies. Americans emerged from the Gulf war convinced of the value of multilateralism, of a growing role for the United Nations and of the need for collective action to meet new threats.

Finally, the Clinton team assumed office with a significantly different view of the future of the U.S.-European relationship. Above all, they were not afraid of a strong and more autonomous Europe but, instead, welcomed it. Many of Clinton's closest aides on European affairs saw the Bush Administration as desperate to maintain NATO's dominance in Europe as a vehicle for American influence--with the commitment to the Base Force of 150,000 reflecting an outdated belief that West European reliance on American military power would give Washington sufficient influence in other areas as well. Above all, they saw the Bush Administration, while giving rhetorical support to both the European Community and the CSCE, in reality being quite ambivalent and de facto resisting practical proposals for either to do more for European security.

In contrast, Clinton and his advisors greeted the emergence of Europe as a more autonomous actor. While every American administration has claimed to support European political and economic unity and a more equal "two pillar" alliance, the Clinton team insisted that they really meant it. During the campaign and afterwards, the President stated that he welcomed a strong Europe and the challenges that would pose for the United States. The Europeans, his advisors insisted, should be encouraged to take more responsibility for their defense. The real

danger was not that they would act autonomously, but rather that they would not do enough. Greater American support for the CSCE was also considered an area where U.S. policy had to change.

The first test cases of Clinton's new multilateralism were two crises inherited from the Bush Administration--Bosnia and Somalia. Although Administration officials claimed--not entirely without justification--that they were dealt a "bad hand" insofar as they inherited two difficult crises not of their own making, each of these crises has rapidly become a crisis closely associated with the President and with a failure of the Administration's new multilateralism. The details of the Bosnia and Somalia crises need not concern us here. What is important for our purposes is to note the impact of these failures on the attempt to define a new multilateralist foreign policy, and how they have specifically influenced American attitudes toward Europe and European security institutions.

Rightly or wrongly, Bosnia became the first test case of Clinton's new multilateralism. From the outset, the Administration put itself at the forefront of efforts to resolve the Bosnian crisis--stating that important principles of international order, stability and democracy were at stake. Moreover, Bosnia was a first attempt to apply many of the principles articulated by the Administration--the importance of the UN, the utility of new instruments such as peacekeeping and peacemaking, a new "out of area" role for NATO, the need to find a new division of labor and power within the trans-Atlantic relationship whereby the United States would remain engaged yet allow the Europeans a greater say in formulating and implementing strategy, etc.

As Bosnia quickly turned into a policy quagmire and it became clear that there was little if any political consensus within the West over how to resolve the crisis, it quickly turned into an embarrassing illustration of how little vision, political will and shared values actually existed either within Europe or between Europe and the United States. As criticism over the Administration's lack of success in its Bosnian policy mounted, senior Administration officials increasingly blamed the Europeans, the nature of the crisis or simply redefined

American objectives in order to reduce the importance that would be attached to the Bosnian quagmire.

In May, an unnamed senior State Department official, rumored to be Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Peter Tarnoff, created a mini-scandal when, in an not-for-attribution speech at the Overseas Writers' Club, he outlined "new rules of engagement" according to which the United States would assume a more modest role in the world. The tenor of Tarnoff's remarks was that with the end of the Cold War and the decline of the nuclear threat, economic interests were ascendant in American foreign policy and the U.S. could no longer be counted on to take the lead in resolving regional disputes caused by "medium-sized bad guys."

Tarnoff's remarks created controversy because they were assumed by many to reflect the "real" thinking and unspoken agenda of the Administration--in effect, this was, so it was claimed, the new "Clinton Doctrine." Critics immediately claimed that all the Administration's activist rhetoric about a "new multilateralism" was only a cover for organizing an American retreat from international affairs, the abandonment of leadership to the vagaries of international events, and an opportunity to dilute past definitions of what constitute "clear and vital national interests." Secretary of State Warren Christopher subsequently sought to clarify Tarnoff's remarks by suggesting that the United States would "of course" still adopt a unilateral approach if necessary when "vital" American interests were at stake, while a multilateral approach would suffice for crises involving lesser interests. Nonetheless, Pandora's box had been opened.

In a speech in late June, Senator Richard Lugar, a Republican moderate and one of the most respected congressional leaders on foreign policy, claimed that the Clinton Administration was in danger of pursuing a "doctrine of diminished U.S. leadership cloaked in 'multilateralism' at a time when the number of security threats are increasing."[6] As Lugar pointed out, the policy dispute over Bosnia was no longer just about Bosnia, but rather about allied unity and the

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[6]See Lugar's speech at the Overseas Writers' Club in Washington on June 24, 1993.

willingness and ability of Europeans and Americans to adjust their Cold War political and security institutions to the changing geo-strategic circumstances in and around Europe. Bosnia, he insisted, was a greater act of collective political failure as an entire political class had sought refuge behind the idea that nothing could be done to stop a war taking place on the one continent where everyone had assumed, only a short time ago, that war had been banished for good. Collective security in Europe had failed once again. The issue was no longer whether America and Europe would be standing side by side accomplishing great and new things in the new post-Cold War world, but whether they could act at all.

Lugar's speech was one catalyst in a broadening debate over the future of multilateralism, Europe, NATO and the nature of American "vital interests" in the post-Cold War era. His claim that not only was multilateralism a failure in the one arena where its proponents had always said it would be most successful, namely U.S.-European relations, but that Europe itself was in danger of unraveling and becoming a major foreign policy challenge in the decade ahead came on the heels of a distinct shift in the *Zeitgeist* of intellectual and political thinking in the United States. The shift is, perhaps, best seen in a visit to the international relations section of your local bookstore. Whereas, several years ago, the initial post-Cold War euphoria reigned, captured in books such as Frank Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* or Sam Huntington's *The Third Wave* which essentially forecast an optimistic international future, by early 1993, we witnessed the rise of a more pessimistic literature forecasting a decade of growing nationalism, fragmentation and geopolitical and geo-cultural confrontation--this reflected in Sam Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations" article in *Foreign Affairs* or books like Zbigniew Brzezinski's *Out of Control*.

By the fall, this debate had spilled over into the realm of the future of European institutions. In another *Foreign Affairs* article entitled "Building a New NATO," three RAND authors put forth a plan for alliance revitalization--a new strategic bargain between America and Europe, a basic overhaul of NATO's strategic rationale in order to

export security into the new trouble spots along Europe's "twin arcs of crisis"--including eventual expansion to include the new democracies of the East--or run the risk of the alliance collapsing and Europe unraveling for the third time this century.[7] By now, the debate over multilateralism had extended well beyond Bosnia and encompassed the basic issue of whether the trans-Atlantic alliance had any future at all.

The second test case of the Administration's multilateralism--and debacle--came in Somalia. If the notion of the U.S.-European relationship as the natural test case for successful multilateralism suffered a serious blow Bosnia, the victim of the Somalian crisis was another pillar of the Administration's new multilateralist thinking, namely the commitment to expanding U.S. military involvement under the auspices of the United Nations and through the vehicle of "peacekeeping"--whereby the latter term was increasingly defined in elastic terms to include a variety of radically different missions ranging from truce enforcement to new forms of combat operations.

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that many of the noble goals articulated by senior Clinton Administration officials along these lines went down to political defeat in the American political context in the streets of Mogadishu. The American experience in Somalia seemed to confirm all of the fears and the worst nightmares of senior political and military officials about the problems inherent in peace support operations, "mission creep," inadequate command and control arrangements, etc. Following the deaths of some 17 American soldiers, the Administration outlined the new rules in Somalia--new forces would be under U.S. and not UN command; nation-building would not be included as part of the American mission; and U.S. forces would be withdrawn by the spring of 1994.

In the American political arena and strategic lexicon, "peacekeeping" was transformed, almost overnight, from a politically attractive form of preventive diplomacy that would keep down the costs of U.S. international engagement into a synonym for political trouble.

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[7]See Ronald D. Asmus, F. Stephen Larrabee and Richard L. Kugler, "Building a new NATO, Foriegn Affairs, September/October 1993.

Congressional reaction led to calls for rewriting the rules of war making and the War Powers Act for any future peacekeeping missions. One senior Administration official was quoted as saying it was "a shock of reality that will force us into a serious reexamination of the U.S involvement in any peacekeeping effort."

The ramifications of Bosnia and Somalia went further, however. Multilateralism and the United Nations no longer seemed to be the vehicle to reduce U.S. burdens, but rather a recipe for either ineffective diplomacy or open-ended commitments in distant places with few prospects of success and where American interests were unclear. Senator Robert Byrd summed up a growing ground swell of opinion on Capitol Hill when he told President Clinton that he had "sworn allegiance to the United States not the United Nations."[8]

One year after Clinton assumed office, some of the new fault lines in the American foreign policy debate were becoming clear. To many in the Clinton Administration, multilateralism remains the right policy reflecting both American interests and the realities of a new and interdependent world. To them, multilateralism is a new and creative way of meshing traditional American foreign policy objectives with allies in a world where the United States, while enjoying the titular title of the sole remaining superpower, nonetheless, more than ever before, needs both the United Nations and other coalitions to pursue its objectives. The problem is not multilateralism's conceptual underpinnings, they insist, but rather "growing pains" and the fact that multilateralism has, thus far, been poorly implemented in several very difficult crises.

For others, however, it is a chimera--in many ways the worst of all possible worlds, for it will simultaneously cede American sovereignty while entangling the United States in a potentially long list of new conflicts where American interests are unclear and where the ability to act decisively is diluted by the constant need to find a strategic common denominator. It is seen as reflecting a dangerous shift away from the post-war center of gravity in American foreign

[8]Washington Post, October 8, 1993.

policy, a cloak for a new redefinition of American national interests and a half-way house toward a new isolationism masked with internationalist rhetoric.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

In the initial wake of the end of the Cold War, the problem of future European security was essentially seen as one of "architecture" or institutional construction. This reflected the belief that Europe was, or at least was becoming, a stable continent after communism's collapse, that the era of conflict and geopolitical competition was largely over, and that the key task for the future of European security was essentially to lock in and sustain those security structures that had seemingly worked so well during the Cold War.

Apart from the dangers of a reversal of reform in Russia, the great danger to European security, or so it seemed, was our own intra-Western squabbling. The problems of European security were therefore seen largely in terms of maintaining domestic consensus and Western cohesion. What many worried about most was that intra-Western rivalry and competing claims for leadership and influence, above all between Washington and Paris, could potentially lead to the unraveling of the American commitment to Europe. The result was the development of the concept of interlocking institutions designed to ensure that everyone had their appropriate seat at the European security table and that an overlapping set of institutional safety nets existed to successfully resolve any future problems.

The focus of these efforts was much more to sustain the relevance of the old Cold War institutions in our eyes, and in the eyes of our publics, as opposed to applying them to the newly emerging security challenges. In retrospect, much of such thinking was short-sighted and, while at times creative, simply misguided. New architectural blueprints notwithstanding, Europe is faced with new security problems and the West's ability or lack thereof to deal with them is, first and foremost, not an institutional issue but rather one of political will. Thus, the issue is not, or perhaps is no longer, merely whether NATO is still relevant in the eyes of our publics, but rather whether the

alliance can stop war in the Balkans, or conflicts and potential new wars from breaking out elsewhere in post-Cold War Europe.

Three years following the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is clear that the revolutions of 1989 not only toppled communism and ultimately unraveled the former USSR; they also unleashed a new set of dynamics that have unraveled the peace orders of Yalta and Versailles. War in the Balkans, instability in East Central Europe and the former USSR, growing doubts about the EC's future and increased uncertainty over the future U.S. role--all underscore the lack of any stable post-Cold War security order in Europe.

As a result, much of the discussion over a future European architecture and inter-locking institutions increasingly sounds somewhat artificial as we are confronted with much more basic strategic issues--the rise of nationalism and a security vacuum on Europe's periphery, the search for new alliances in East-Central Europe, new geopolitical jockeying and a partial renationalization in parts of Western Europe, nuclear proliferation, etc. The problem in European security is not lack of institutions but a lack of strategic vision and coherence along with political will. Without those factors, interlocking institutions become interblocking institutions or decaying and impotent institutions. With those factors, even radical institutional changes becomes possible even though the details will always remain contentious.

It is only against this background that one can understand why Europe, which was envisioned as a key partner in a new multilateralist American foreign policy, has not been a major factor or priority in American thinking over the last year. For many of the initial assumptions regarding European security and Europe as a partner have proven over ambitious or simply wrong. An Administration that came into office more open-minded and, at least in principle, committed to reforming NATO, encouraging a strong Europe and the development of a European defense identity, and enhancing the role of institutions like the CSCE, finds itself increasingly frustrated and, heretofore, largely unable to formulate its European policy.

Europe has returned as an issue--not as an opportunity and a new and willing ally in new multilateralist ventures, as expected, but rather as a problem and source of frustration. How much of a problem Europe could become, and how or whether it affects vital American interests, are the subjects of the new debate taking place in the United States. For better or worse, NATO and alliance reform is the next test case of Clinton's multilateralism and the ability of America and Europe to define a new partnership to address the new security problems in and around Europe and to build a new partnership for peace and stability in a broader international context. Should this attempt fail, the ramifications will be far-reaching. In the United States, multilateralism will have openly failed. In Europe, the continent's future stability could be jeopardized.