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**Research Report**

## America Policy: Some conceptual thoughts about dealing with the hegemon

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# SWP Research Paper

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik  
German Institute for International  
and Security Affairs

*Peter Rudolf*

## America Policy

Some Conceptual Thoughts about  
Dealing with the Hegemon

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# Table of Contents

5	<b>Problems and Conclusions</b>
7	<b>What Do We Want from the United States?</b>
9	<b>Overstretched Empire or Liberal Hegemony: Where Is the United States Going?</b>
9	America as Empire?
10	American Hegemony
11	Bush's Hegemonialism
13	Imperial Overstretch?
14	New "Isolationism"?
15	Back to the Basics of Liberal Hegemony?
16	<b>As Much Cooperation as Possible, as Much Criticism as Necessary: Maxims of a Two-Track Policy</b>
16	Cooperation and Support
17	Criticism and Assertiveness
20	<b>Strategy Mix in Dealing with the United States</b>
20	Closing Ranks
21	Soft Balancing
22	Conditional Cooperation
24	<b>Modular Multilateralism? On the Changed Institutional Context of Policy toward America</b>

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**America Policy.  
Some Conceptual Thoughts about  
Dealing with the Hegemon**

The strategic transformation in American foreign policy under President George W. Bush heated up existing structural conflicts in transatlantic relations, and Iraq brought them to boiling point, especially between Germany and the United States. Put bluntly, American foreign policy is global in outlook, multilateralism is understood instrumentally and not as a restraint on unilateral action, and military might is abundantly available and frequently used. European foreign policy, and specifically German, on the other hand, is regionally focused, with a preference for multilateral approaches and the use of political and economic instruments.

Due to its position of exceptional power in the international system and its specific political culture, the United States will always pursue a foreign policy *sui generis*, and this will always contain potential for transatlantic conflict. But the extent of strategic divergence from Europe is not a fact of nature; it is determined by the fundamental foreign policy orientation prevailing in Washington and the power constellation there. But developing a differentiated *America policy*—avoiding the twin traps of instinctive clinging to the United States and knee-jerk rejection of American claims to hegemony—remains one of the central challenges for German and European foreign policy.

This study provides some conceptual thoughts about policy towards the United States. Of course such ideas are not unknown to political practitioners, but honing and differentiating them can heighten awareness of one's own possibilities for influencing and shaping events. What follows is not about identifying and discussing concrete areas of action for transatlantic cooperation. It is about more fundamental questions. What international role for the United States is desirable? What can be done to foster such a role? What guidelines and options for dealing with the United States flow from this? Which institutional framework is best suited for shaping relations with the hegemon?

The most important findings and conclusions of this study can be summarized in the following theses:

- ▶ American leadership in international affairs remains—and this is one of the basic premises of the present study—in many areas necessary and often without any alternative. None of the other major powers possesses comparable capacity or such strong will to shape international relations as the American superpower. The current foreign policy debate in the United States is not about giving up the international leadership role, but in essence about how this role can be secured in the longer term and politically legitimated as a liberal hegemony.
- ▶ The starting point of the argument is that *America policy* should be guided by the plausible assumption that German and European positions are not without influence in the current American debate about the country's role in the world. The fundamental goal of policy towards the United States, consequently, should be to influence this discourse through a two-track approach. While the consensual elements of American leadership (in the sense of liberal hegemony) should be strengthened with words and deeds, levelheaded criticism will remain necessary to counter objectionable elements of American foreign policy that contradict the logic of liberal hegemony and German/European interests and values.
- ▶ From this fundamental position follows the necessity of a differentiated *America policy* in the European setting. In the interest of optimizing influence, such an approach will have to consist of a policy mix. According to cost-benefit considerations, three basic strategic options for dealing with individual policy areas in transatlantic relations can be identified. *Firstly*, there is the option of closing ranks with United States, whether because the American course coincides with one's own interests, or because in the absence of fundamental divergence of interests participation will give the chance to influence the details of a policy that is largely determined by the United States. The *second* option is to assert German/European alternatives through "soft balancing". This can involve using international institutions in order to restrict the exercise of American power or at least to gain influence over it. Another form can be the refusal to give international legitimacy to American actions or to particular policy concepts. Finally, "soft balancing" can also involve showing independent international leadership in those fields where the United States tends to block progress rather than initiate it. The *third option*, finally, is that of conditional cooperation. This can mean putting clear conditions on the readiness to follow US policy in order to persuade Washington to change its course. Conditional cooperation can also take the form of a classical "linkage" strategy, where two different issue areas are coupled in order to strengthen one's own negotiating position.
- ▶ The geostrategic paradigm shift is in full swing—in the short term toward the Middle East and the threat of terrorism, in the longer term to East Asia. Thus there is little to suggest that NATO can be revived as the once unique institutional bond between the United States and Europe, as the institution that opened up opportunities for reciprocal influence in the core area of security policy. A de facto *modular multilateralism* has emerged for concrete policy coordination, manifested in function-specific contact groups composed of representatives of the most important powers (Balkan Contact Group, Middle East Quartet, EU-3 in close coordination with the United States, now P5+1). A new multilateralism such as this, made up of complementary, overlapping, sometimes very informal institutions, will increasingly become the framework of action in which Germany has to shape its dealings with a sometimes difficult—but very often indispensable—hegemon.

## What Do We Want from the United States?

The term “*America policy*” finds almost no place in German diplomatic vocabulary. Instead the talk is of transatlantic relations, and these are institutionally so interwoven and the interactions so diverse and intense that there is no need to speak of an explicit policy towards the United States. According to the predominant interpretation, transatlantic relations continue to represent one of two fundamental pillars on which Germany’s multilaterally-based foreign policy rests, alongside institutional integration in the European Union. The German Defense Policy Guidelines of May 2003 underline the traditional standpoint that without the United States there can be peace neither for nor within Europe.<sup>1</sup>

For security policy in the narrower sense—the defense of Germany’s political sovereignty and territorial integrity—however, the United States is no longer required. It is also questionable whether the United States is still needed as a “European power” to allay other European states’ fears of German hegemony. To quote then-Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer in 2002, “Without our transatlantic relations, Germany would quickly end up in a role in Europe, even in today’s Europe, that we do not want to be aiming for. It would be too much for us. The United States does not only balance globally, to this day it balances in Europe too.”<sup>2</sup> But by the mid-1990s this view was already shared by only a minority of the German elite (29 percent).<sup>3</sup>

There is, however, no doubt that Germany still “needs” the United States in a different sense, and that indeed the United States perhaps also “needs” Germany too. For: “Without the United States the great world order goals of international politics

cannot be attained, and these in fact also include containing American power. The United States needs support in the sensible application of its power—and occasionally to be shown that senseless use of power can be prevented.”<sup>4</sup>

American leadership remains necessary in many fields, and in many cases there are no adequate alternatives. None of the other major powers possesses power resources or strength of will to shape international politics that come anywhere near matching the American superpower. The United States is, at least in the field of international security, more or less the functional equivalent of a “world government.”<sup>5</sup> Now, as Joseph Nye once pertinently observed, international security is rather like oxygen: you generally only notice it when it disappears.<sup>6</sup> What would the world look like if the United States were not the ultimate guarantor of oil security, if American ships did not ensure the safety of the oceans, if the United States did not exercise a stabilizing function in East Asia as the primary balancing power?<sup>7</sup>

If we accept the premise that the United States is indeed internationally to a certain degree an “indispensable nation,” then policy toward the United States must be about supporting those positive elements of

4 Gebhard Schweigler, *Die unbequeme Weltmacht: Herausforderungen transatlantischer Beziehungen*, Washington, D.C., April 2004, manuscript for a program on August 22, 2004, on Deutschlandfunk radio in the series “Für eine bessere Außenpolitik” (For a Better Foreign Policy), [www.dradio.de/download/20381](http://www.dradio.de/download/20381).

5 This is the thesis of Michael Mandelbaum, *The Case for Goliath: How America Acts as the World’s Government in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

6 Joseph S. Nye, jr., “The Case for Deep Engagement,” *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 4 (July/August 1995): 90–102.

7 Of course counterfactual speculation is always racked with difficulties. Nonetheless, a balanced assessment of the international role of the United States is impossible without giving consideration to the alternative: what would be the consequences for the international order if the United States were not to exercise this leading role? For a critical evaluation of the hegemonic role that, however, excludes this aspect, see James L. Richardson, *American Hegemony: A Dangerous Aspiration*, Working Paper 2006/2 (Canberra: Australian National University, Department of International Relations, May 2006).

1 Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien für den Geschäftsbereich des Bundesministers der Verteidigung*, Berlin, May 2003, 22.

2 Speech by German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer to the German Bundestag during debate on transatlantic relations of June 27, 2002, [www.auswaertiges-amt.de](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de).

3 On this see *Das Meinungsbild der Elite in Deutschland zur Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik: Eine Studie von Infratest Burke Berlin im Auftrag des Liberalen Institutes der Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung in Kooperation mit der RAND Corporation*, Berlin, March 1996.



the leading role that conform with ideas of liberal hegemony—with words, and with actions too. But it will also remain necessary to clearly criticize those objectionable tendencies in American foreign policy that contradict the logic of liberal hegemony and our own interests and values.<sup>8</sup> Different consequences will be drawn—tending toward support or more toward criticism depending on the assessment of the American role in the specific case.

The point is neither to build Europe up as a power balancing the United States, nor to bandwagon, acting as nothing more than a junior partner.<sup>9</sup> Balancing is neither necessary—because the United States represents no threat to Europe—nor realistic, because it has no support within Europe. By confining itself to the role of merely a junior partner, Europe would deny itself real opportunities for shaping international affairs and possibilities for influencing American foreign policy.

So what is necessary is a policy aimed at shifting American positions toward the role of a *liberal hegemon* whose foreign policy takes the preferences and positions of other states into consideration when determining its own interests and behaves as a force for international order. The role of the liberal hegemon, on which American global policy has been based since 1945, is rooted in three important principles:<sup>10</sup>

- ▶ Firstly, maintaining cooperative relations with the other major powers, whose interests must be taken into consideration in order to give them as little incentive as possible to challenge the American-led international order and alter the balance of power.
- ▶ Secondly, willingness to intervene (militarily) for the sake of the international order even when vital national interests are not directly affected.
- ▶ Thirdly, a preference for multilateral mechanisms—so that other states have a chance to bring in their own interests and perspectives—and a willingness

<sup>8</sup> On this see the deliberations of Barry Buzan, *The United States and the Great Powers: World Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 187–95.

<sup>9</sup> On these two alternatives and the associated problems see Volker Rittberger and Fariborz Zelli, “Europa in der Weltpolitik: Juniorpartner der USA oder antihegemoniale Alternative?” *Die Friedens-Warte* 78, no. 2–3 (2003): 195–233.

<sup>10</sup> On this complex see G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001); idem, “Getting Hegemony Right,” *The National Interest* 63 (2001): 17–24; William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security* 24, no. 1 (summer 1999): 5–41.

to itself obey the rules of multilateral institutions that apply to all and to constructively build and develop such institutions.

That actual American foreign policy—even before the current administration took office—did not correspond to this *ideal type* is obvious. For all his efforts to present American leadership as liberal hegemony, the tendency toward unilateral strategies was already apparent under President Bill Clinton. Unlike later under President George W. Bush, this tendency was a product not of the administration’s strategic orientation, but instead arose structurally through the strengthened role of Congress following the end of the Cold War. Congress turned out to be open to resistance put up by particularistic social and bureaucratic actors against greater multilateral integration of American power. Ideologically, the Republicans, then the majority party in Congress, were drawn toward a policy focused more on narrow national great power interests than on the imperatives of a hegemonic role. Consequently, the majority preference of the American public—for a multilateralist international leadership role—was not reflected in the policies of Congress.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the concept of the liberal hegemonic role remains present as a regulative ideal in the American self-image and in the American debate and as such also functions as a critical yardstick in dealings with the United States.

The fundamental thesis of this study is developed in *three* steps. In a *first* step I show why the talk of an “American Empire” that has become fashionable in recent years obscures rather than illuminates the international role of the United States, while the term hegemony better grasps the realities of the role itself and the current American foreign policy debate. In the second step I explain why a return to the role of liberal hegemon can—if at all—best be promoted through a twin-track strategy of cooperative support and critical distance. In a *third* step I argue that a differentiated America policy of this kind requires a strategy mix. I conclude with a number of thoughts on the changing institutional contexts of dealing with the United States.

<sup>11</sup> See Peter Rudolf, “Amerikanische Außenpolitik im Spannungsverhältnis zwischen hegemonialen Ansprüchen und innenpolitischen Restriktionen,” in *Stabilität und Kooperation: Aufgaben internationaler Ordnungspolitik*, ed. Jens van Scherpenberg and Peter Schmidt, 217–33 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2000); David Skidmore, “Understanding the Unilateralist Turn in US Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1, no. 2 (July 2005): 207–28.

## Overstretched Empire or Liberal Hegemony: Where Is the United States Going?

There has been much talk in recent years of an American “empire,” of American dominance, of an imperial foreign policy. Developments in Iraq, it is said, have revealed “imperial overstretch,” and the “Titan” has become weary. These days, we even hear worries that an “Iraq syndrome” could lead the United States to succumb to the “isolationist urge.” Catchy metaphors and analogies of this kind play an important role, shaping perceptions in the domestic debate within the United States and also in the worldwide discussion of American foreign policy. But if uncritically accepted, such images blur our perception of the real contours of American foreign policy—and thus confuse the real issue in the current foreign policy debate: the question of whether the United States is returning to the ground rules and logic of liberal, “benevolent” hegemony.

The way we perceive and interpret the role of the United States has repercussions on our analyses of the current international system and on our assessments of the development trends of American foreign policy. Therefore, a critical analysis of the American empire debate of recent years, and the establishment of the most realistic possible interpretation of the United States’ international role must be of more than academic interest.<sup>12</sup>

### America as Empire?

The latest revival of talk of an “American Empire,” which previously served the needs of radical critics of American foreign policy in the context of the Vietnam War, has been triggered by the foreign policy of the Bush Administration. The term “empire” has turned into a code equally capable of expressing emphatic rejection of these policies or their enthusiastic support.<sup>13</sup> By critics who see the United States on the way to becoming an “empire” and warn of the dangers of

an “imperial strategy,” it is used as a provocative metaphor rather than a narrow analytical term. But the expression is also used by certain supporters of Bush’s foreign policy, who believe they are openly expressing what they identify as his policy’s unspoken guiding principles.<sup>14</sup>

A glance at a number of peculiarities of the current debate demonstrates how little the talk of an “American Empire” serves any understanding of the United States’ global political role.<sup>15</sup> *Firstly*, the term plainly has little or nothing to do with what we generally associate with classical empires: great geographical extent, multiethnic composition, political rule against the will of the subject nations.<sup>16</sup> *Secondly*, the terms “empire” and “imperial” are used in a very vague sense. Rarely is there any specific definition of what the American Empire is actually about and what distinguishes the meaning of this term from others that merely express the following simple facts: the United States is a state with unrivaled power resources that acts expansively in the sense that it seeks to implement its ideas of political and economic order across the world.<sup>17</sup> If however—and this is the *third* peculiarity of the empire discourse—we apply a more precisely defined understanding of empire, namely, a hierarchical international system in which one state possesses a virtual monopoly of the organized use of

<sup>14</sup> The message is that a self-aware imperialism is preferable to alternative international orders; only if the Americans recognize the imperial character of the order they lead, they will gain the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of earlier empires. Niall Ferguson, “The Unconscious Colossus: Limits of (& Alternatives to) American Empire,” *Daedalus* 134, no. 2 (spring 2005): 18–33 (quotes p. 21).

<sup>15</sup> A good overview is provided by the essays in Ulrich Speck and Natan Sznaider, eds., *Empire Amerika: Perspektiven einer neuen Weltordnung* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2003), while solid criticism of this problematic discussion is found in the contributions in Craig Calhoun, Frederick Cooper, and Kevin W. Moore, eds., *Lessons of Empire: Imperial Histories and American Power* (New York and London: The New Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> As in the definition given by Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), xi f.

<sup>17</sup> Campbell Craig, “American Realism versus American Imperialism,” *World Politics* 57, no. 1 (October 2004): 143–71 (159).

<sup>12</sup> Nick Bisley, “Neither Empire nor Republic: American Power and Regional Order in the Asia-Pacific,” *International Politics* 43, no. 2 (2006): 197–218 (198f).

<sup>13</sup> Paul K. MacDonald, *Imperial Ambitions? United States Foreign Policy and the Language of Empire*, mimeo (Stanford: Stanford Institute for International Studies, February 2, 2005).

military force and subordinate states entrust their security to the imperial state, in the process giving up a central element of their sovereignty, then the question arises as to whether states such as Saudi Arabia, whose external security is largely guaranteed by the United States, are a part of the American Empire even if the American influence on their internal affairs (and even on their external behavior) is very limited. And, *fourthly*, on the one hand, the term is used to criticize a supposedly radical departure from the post-1945 foreign policy orientation; on the other hand, some observers hold that the policy of the Bush Administration is only the pronounced expression of an imperial policy that has been pursued for a long time.

How was such a dubious term as “empire” able to find such resonance? Certainly in part because it appeared to express the unique position the United States has occupied since the end of the Cold War—more catchily than the talk of the “indispensable nation,” “leadership,” “primacy,” or “unipolarity” were able to. But when the words “empire” and “imperial” are used, something else is often meant, which is better expressed by a different term: hegemony.<sup>18</sup>

If we are to understand the United States’ international role, what we require is not a blurring of distinctions for the purposes of historical comparison,<sup>19</sup> but a clear distinction between the concepts of empire and hegemony.<sup>20</sup> As the historian Paul Schroeder convincingly reminds us, historically

**18** The term “empire” to characterize current American foreign policy might be appropriate if used in the sense of what was once termed the “universal empire” in the modern system of states: the dominant position in the system of states. But in today’s vocabulary the term “global hegemony” tends to be used to characterize this role. For more on this, see David C. Hendrickson, “The Curious Case of American Hegemony: Imperial Aspirations and National Decline,” *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 2 (summer 2005): 1–22.

**19** As in Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America’s Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

**20** This analytically meaningful dividing line is lacking in the hypothesis of a fluid transition between hegemony and empire. For Münkler the deciding criterium is not “intervention in the internal affairs of smaller states,” but power relations between states. From this point of view a hegemon is “the first among approximate equals,” while an empire exists when the “power difference between the central power and the other members of the political order has become so great that it can no longer be bridged by fictions of equality.” Herfried Münkler, *Imperien: Die Logik der Weltherrschaft vom Alten Rom bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2005), 77.)

speaking the term “empire” involves “political control exercised by one organized political unit over another unit separate from and alien to it.”<sup>21</sup> This need not necessarily be direct, formal control in the form of occupation, annexation, or protectorate. It can also mean indirect, informal rule, whether in the guise of economic or cultural dominance, or in the form of a latent or open threat of military intervention. The defining feature of an empire is its “final authority,” in whatever form this is exercised. Of course it is difficult to determine at which point informally exercised power actually transforms into such influence to the extent that we can speak of effective control.<sup>22</sup> Not until this stage would we actually be dealing with an informal empire, rather than simply with imperial ambitions.<sup>23</sup>

## American Hegemony

The term hegemony—whether in its global or regional version—designates the predominant influence and recognized leadership of one political unit in a system, without that unit having the ultimate decision-making authority.<sup>24</sup> Now if we look more closely, hegemony is also a disputed concept, which is used in different ways in different theoretical approaches.<sup>25</sup> There is no disagreement, however, that hegemony

**21** Paul Schroeder, “Is the US an Empire?” February 16, 2004; <http://hnn.us/articles/1237.html>.

**22** Joseph A. Fry, “Imperialism, American Style, 1890–1916,” in *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890–1993*, ed. Gordon Martel, 52–70 (53) (London/New York: Routledge, 1994).

**23** And this is an empirical, not a conceptual question. A significant empirical deficit of the empire discussion is that the spatial extent, the reach, and the limits of the supposed American empire are never defined.

**24** “Hegemony means clear, acknowledged leadership and dominant influence by one unit within a community of units not under a single authority.” Schroeder, “Is the US an Empire?” (see note 21). For Michael Doyle, on the other hand, the decisive difference between empire and hegemony is the range of effective political control: “Control of both foreign and domestic policy characterizes empire, control of only foreign policy, hegemony.” Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 40. In this sense, hegemony becomes a purely relational concept; the systemic level and the influence exerted by the state on the norms and rules of international relations are excluded from this definition.

**25** Miriam Prys, “The Contested Concept of Hegemony: Using Conceptual Analysis as a Toll for Clarification” (paper presented at the 45th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Montreal, March 17–20, 2004).

requires a material basis—sufficient power resources—the full spectrum of which only the United States possesses in this day and age.<sup>26</sup> Hegemony, in the sense on which the following arguments are based, encompasses the possession of overwhelming power resources in connection with their application for purposes of international leadership.<sup>27</sup>

Even in the phase of greatest power since 1945, the hegemony of the United States—understood as the capacity of the leading economic and military power to largely determine the rules and shape the institutions of the international system—was never comprehensive, but always regionally and functionally limited.<sup>28</sup> At the end of World War II, in light of the experience of the 1930s and 1940s, the United States was determined to take on the role of the hegemon in order to create a stable international order in which its free-market capitalist system could flourish.<sup>29</sup> This hegemony adopted a specific American form: post-1945 American foreign policy was guided by ideas of a multilateral order. In its pure form it required the setting up of institutions whose rules were to apply to all. By virtue of this orientation, liberal American hegemony was indeed different from all other forms of hegemonic power.<sup>30</sup> So the vision of a multilateral order was based not only—as the realist critique would have it—on naive idealism, and faith in this vision represented more than just a rhetorical embellishment of power politics. Instead, the United States, as

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “American Primacy in Perspective,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July–August 2002): 20–33.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Cox, “September 11th and US Hegemony – Or Will the 21st Century Be American Too?” *International Studies Perspectives* 3, no. 1 (February 2002): 53–70 (55). Building on the classic work by Heinrich Triepel, Werner Link defines hegemony as a “leadership relationship where a powerful state exerts ‘defining influence’ and other states (the ‘vassal states’) accept this.” Werner Link, “Hegemonie und Gleichgewicht der Macht,” in *Sicherheit und Frieden zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts. Konzeptionen–Akteure–Regionen*, ed. Mir A. Ferdowsi, 3d ed., 43–61 (45), (Munich: Bayerische Landeszentrale für politische Bildungsarbeit, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> On the understanding of hegemony, see Joseph S. Nye, jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 37–40.

<sup>29</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> It reflected, as John Gerard Ruggie argues, the political idea and identity of the United States as a community that is in principle open to all. John Gerard Ruggie, *Winning the Peace: America and World Order in the New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 20–27.

the leading power, placed limits on its own unilateral action for the sake of a multilateral order. It was the multilateralism of a power that clearly predominated in the West and thus had broad room for maneuver.<sup>31</sup>

The integration of other states in the world order concept and normative ideas of the hegemonic power was a characteristic feature.<sup>32</sup> American hegemony was institutional rather than territorial and imperial in thrust. Ultimately, with reference to the major international institutions, we can speak of an “institutionalized hegemony” of liberal ideas—and thus in fact of the West as a whole as a “collective hegemon.” In this formation the United States had a constitutive and enforcing function.<sup>33</sup>

American hegemonic foreign policy has different faces depending on whom it is addressing: toward democratic allies benevolent and consensus-seeking and based on “soft power”; toward authoritarian states coercive and based on hard power resources—and yes, under certain circumstances even adopting imperial forms.<sup>34</sup> The policy was imperial above all on the periphery of the international state system and especially in the Western sphere of influence.<sup>35</sup>

## Bush's Hegemonialism

Under President Bush the slogan of “global war on terror”—specifically in its state-centered form directed against “terror states” with weapons of mass destruction—served to legitimize the implementation of new strategic paradigm:<sup>36</sup> a hegemonialism with imperial implications, a “grand strategy” that builds in the first

<sup>31</sup> Robert W. Tucker, “The Future of a Contradiction,” *The National Interest* 43 (spring 1996): 20–27 (26).

<sup>32</sup> John Agnew, *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 1f.

<sup>33</sup> Donald J. Puchala, “World Hegemony and the United Nations,” *International Studies Review* 7 (2005): 571–84.

<sup>34</sup> For this differentiated approach to hegemonic foreign policy, see Bernd W. Kubbig, “Between Self-Restraint and ‘All Options Open’: Positioning the US Hegemon in the Democratic/Non-Democratic Divide: Conclusions,” in “Toward a New American Century? The US Hegemon in Motion,” ed. idem (guest editor), special issue, *Amerikastudien* 46, no. 4 (2001): 661–86.

<sup>35</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “Illusions of Empire: Defining the New American Order,” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 2 (March/April 2004): 144–56.

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed treatment, see Peter Rudolf, *George W. Bushs außenpolitische Strategie*, SWP-Studie S 25/2005 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, September 2005), [http://www.swp-berlin.org/de/common/get\\_document.php?id=1395](http://www.swp-berlin.org/de/common/get_document.php?id=1395).

place not on consensus-oriented cooperation within multilateral institutions but on unilateral action and hard “enforcing power” to implement its own, very broadly defined security interests.<sup>37</sup> The central principles in this paradigm are: firstly preserving the United States’ superior power position, especially its unmatched military superiority over other states, as the guarantee of international stability (following the theory of “hegemonic stability”); secondly, maintaining strategic independence by connecting a pronounced unilateralism with elements of an instrumental multilateralism that accepts the usefulness of international institutions in those cases where they grant international legitimacy to foreign policy activities and help to reduce the costs to the United States; thirdly expanding the understanding of legitimate self-defense to encompass a right to offensive “preventive self-defense”; fourthly the transformation of autocratic states toward freedom and democracy with—and this is the really new thing—the Arab world in focus.

The Iraq intervention was the imperial consequence of the new American hegemonialism, an expression of the center-stage role assigned to military might, of the conviction that the United States was a force for good, of optimistic assessments of American capabilities, and of the will to actively reshape the global security environment.<sup>38</sup> The intervention demonstrated that the United States is exposed to the “imperial temptations” to which great powers have succumbed again and again in history:<sup>39</sup> the preventive use of offensive military power to eliminate potential future threats—driven by a striving for “absolute security” triggered in this case by 9/11 but also found at many other points in American history.<sup>40</sup>

But the transatlantic controversy in the run-up to the war already showed that one of the fundamental tenets of Bush’s foreign policy was false: namely the

idea that if America only showed determined leadership and strength of will, the initially skeptical states would jump on board and thus grant the American actions the international legitimacy on which the United States to a certain degree depends—for domestic political reasons too—in its traditional self-image as the “benevolent hegemon.”<sup>41</sup> In the end the occupation of Iraq revealed the limits of American military might—and the limits of “imperial” policy.

Iraq marked both the culmination of the new foreign policy paradigm and its crisis. It has not yet been replaced by a new one,<sup>42</sup> but the dearth of foreign policy alternatives and a changed personnel constellation have dampened the original, virtually revolutionary élan, forced a rapprochement with other states, and contributed to a return to smooth, flexible diplomacy.<sup>43</sup> The limits to strategic options were demonstrated especially clearly in dealing with the two remaining states of the “Axis of Evil”: North Korea and Iran. For some time in the case of North Korea,<sup>44</sup> and later with Iran too,<sup>45</sup> the United States under Bush has been operating in the framework of a concert of the major powers. But it is doubtful whether a lasting restitution of the logic of liberal hegemony (“multilateral where possible, unilateral where necessary”) is taking place in the policies of the Bush Administration.

<sup>37</sup> For the terms see Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, “Power in International Politics,” *International Organization* 59 (winter 2005): 39–75 (62ff). On the question of whether and to what extent Bush’s foreign policy represents an ideological turn toward imperial policy, see also John Agnew, “American Hegemony into American Empire? Lessons from the Invasion of Iraq,” *Antipode*, 2003, 871–85.

<sup>38</sup> James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2004), 362ff.

<sup>39</sup> Jack Snyder, “Imperial Temptations,” *The National Interest* 71 (spring 2003): 29–40.

<sup>40</sup> James Chace and Caleb Carr, *America Invulnerable: The Quest for Absolute Security from 1812 to Star Wars* (New York: Summit Books, 1988).

<sup>41</sup> Robert Kagan, “America’s Crisis of Legitimacy,” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 2 (March/April 2004): 65–87.

<sup>42</sup> In comparison to the version of 2002, the National Security Strategy of 2006 shows signs of a shift in emphasis toward promoting democracy, but rather than representing a new strategic design, it contains in essence the core elements of the strategy of 2002. For a critical analysis see Lawrence Korb and Caroline Wadhams, *A Critique of the Bush Administration’s National Security Strategy*, Policy Analysis Brief (Muscatine, IA: The Stanley Foundation, June 2006).

<sup>43</sup> On this and the following, see James Kitfield, “Foreign Policy – After the Revolution,” *National Journal*, February 4, 2006; Richard N. Haass, “Is There a Doctrine in the House?” *The New York Times*, November 8, 2005.

<sup>44</sup> On this see David Kerr, “The Sino-Russian Partnership and US Policy toward North Korea: From Hegemony to Concert in Northeast Asia,” *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (September 2005): 411–37.

<sup>45</sup> For example David E. Sanger, “Bush’s Realization on Iran: No Good Choice Left Except Talks,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 2006.

## Imperial Overstretch?

With tax cuts on the one side and massive spending for the American military and the war in Iraq on the other combining to fuel an enormous budget deficit financed by foreign capital inflows, it is no wonder that the debate over “imperial overstretch” has erupted again. It burst forth once before, in the pessimistic “fin-de-siècle” mood of the late 1980s, but then the collapse of the Soviet empire and the economic boom of the 1990s abruptly silenced that discussion.<sup>46</sup>

A combination of expensive international commitments and economic weakness will—according to the argument we are hearing again now—lead to hegemonic decline, and the United States will be unable to escape the fate of former hegemonic powers.<sup>47</sup> Predictions of this kind should be regarded less as forecasts of unavoidable developments than as calls to pull the tiller round, to turn toward a less ambitious, more modest foreign policy.

But is the United States already the “weary Titan” that Great Britain was a century ago, as Timothy Garton Ash claims?<sup>48</sup> The analogy—and here John Ikenberry, a critic of imperial ambitions, is right—is certainly false: Great Britain was plainly imperially overstretched, the United States is not. The relative power positions of Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century and America at the beginning of the twenty-first differ fundamentally. Great Britain back then had already long passed the zenith of its power; that cannot be said of the United States. Back then, the United States, and perhaps Germany too, had already overtaken Britain as leading industrial powers, while the United States is today still a long way ahead. For Ikenberry the American problem is not material overstretch but “awful leadership.” The international constellation, he says, is favorable for a long-term institutionalization of America’s leading role; the problem is wise foreign policy rather than a lack

of power resources.<sup>49</sup> Nor can we speak of “imperial overstretch” in financial terms either. Defense spending represents just four percent of GDP, which is much less than during the Cold War.<sup>50</sup>

It is hard to predict how long the current policy of “guns and butter” can be sustained, how long it will be possible to “square an acceptable rate of overall economic growth with a high level of domestic consumption powered by low interest rates, a high budget deficit, and the resulting growing current account deficit.”<sup>51</sup> Shifting burdens to other states is one option for counteracting economic imbalances, whether through agreements or by means of market mechanisms; cutting spending and reversing the massive tax cuts carried out under President Bush represents another, politically less opportune. Either way, in purely economic terms the United States has not reached the limits of its current policies.

Militarily, on the other hand, Iraq is certainly a case of “imperial overstretch.” The occupation has put enormous strain on the American military—specifically its ground troops.<sup>52</sup> If the United States were to reduce the troops stationed directly in Iraq to just under one hundred thousand, that would represent a level that is sustainable in the longer term from the purely military standpoint.<sup>53</sup> Politically, the Administration did not have to fear serious demands or deadlines for withdrawal from a Congress controlled by the Republican Party. It had achieved such success in establishing its interpretation of the Iraq War as part of the “War on Terror”—and focusing it on the alternative of “victory or defeat” and the demonstration of American resolution—that criticism from Congress remained toothless despite the decline in

<sup>46</sup> Rudolf Witzel, “Der Niedergang Amerikas – Mythos oder Realität? Zur Selbstverständnisdebatte in den USA,” in *Transatlantische Unsicherheit: Die amerikanisch-europäischen Beziehungen im Umbruch*, ed. Bernd W. Kubbig, 105–24 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991); Paul Kennedy, “Fin-de-Siècle America,” *The New York Review of Books*, June 28, 1990, 31–40.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Layne, “The Cost of Empire,” *The American Conservative*, October 3, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, “Stagger On, Weary Titan,” *The Guardian*, August 25, 2005.

<sup>49</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “Weary Titan or Poorly Led Superpower?” September 5, 2005, <http://www.tpmcafe.com/story/2005/9/5/135627/8001>.

<sup>50</sup> Military spending aside, we can actually ascertain what Joseph Nye called “imperial understretch.” Spending on the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development amounts to just one percent of the federal budget. Joseph S. Nye, “Ill-Suited for Empire,” *The Washington Post*, May 25, 2003.

<sup>51</sup> On this and the following, see Jens van Scherpenberg, *Der geborgte Aufschwung. Die wirtschaftspolitische Bilanz der Regierung Bush 2001–2004*, SWP-Studie S 40/2004, (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, October 2004), 33ff (quote p. 33).

<sup>52</sup> Congressional Budget Office, *An Analysis of the US Military’s Ability to Sustain an Occupation in Iraq: An Update*, October 5, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Bradley Graham and Robin Wright, “3 Brigades May Be Cut in Iraq Early in 2006,” *The Washington Post*, November 23, 2005, A01.

public support for the war.<sup>54</sup> Although the Iraq issue helped the Democrats to regain the majority in Congress, divergent views on this issue among them, political calculations, strategic realities on the ground and the institutional and political power of the President will restrain the role of Congress and make any meaningful attempts at forcing a withdrawal from Iraq highly unlikely.

Public support evaporated quickly—compared with the two other post-1945 wars where the United States sustained a considerable level of losses of its own, namely, Korea and Vietnam.<sup>55</sup> Consequently talk of an “Iraq syndrome” has long begun doing the rounds in the American discussion. Coalescing into an “Iraq syndrome,” doubts about the prudence of decisions to undertake ambitious military interventions, doubts about their chances of success, doubts about the strategic judgment of political leaders, and doubts about the ability of politicians and intelligence agencies to properly assess threats to fundamental American interests will cause difficulties for future administrations too.<sup>56</sup>

## New “Isolationism”?

But has the Iraq trauma made Americans more isolationist, as reports in international newspapers

<sup>54</sup> That became very apparent in June 2006, when both houses of Congress conducted a broad debate about the war for the first time since the invasion of Iraq. A resolution proclaiming support for victory in the “war on terror” and rejecting the setting of an “arbitrary date” for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq was rejected in the House of Representatives by a majority of 256 (including 42 Democrats) to 153. In the Senate 31 Democratic senators voted together with all the Republicans against a motion introduced by Senator John Kerry calling for the withdrawal of most American forces from Iraq by July 2007, with the exception of those required for training Iraqi security forces, protecting American citizens, and fighting terrorists. Jonathan Broder, “Iraq Echoes in Both Chambers,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly*, June 19, 2006, 1700; John M. Donnelly, “Senate’s Iraq War Debate Yields No New Answers,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly*, June 26, 2006, 1783.

<sup>55</sup> By the beginning of 2005, when the number of US dead had reached fifteen hundred, half of Americans already saw the intervention as a failure. In Vietnam, twenty thousand Americans had died before half the public came to regard the war as a mistake in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive. John Mueller, “The Iraq Syndrome,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 6 (November/December 2005): 44–54.

<sup>56</sup> See Lawrence Freedman’s assessment, “Rumsfeld’s Legacy: The Iraq Syndrome,” *The Washington Post*, January 9, 2005, B04.

and magazines would have us believe?<sup>57</sup> A debate over a new isolationism is certainly brewing, not least because American administrations are always tempted to tar critics of their policies with the brush of isolationism, and these days even President Bush is warning of the “the false comfort of isolationism.”<sup>58</sup> But American isolationism is a complex, often-misunderstood phenomenon.<sup>59</sup> Over the course of American history the isolationist tradition has taken on different colorings, but its decisive facets have remained constant all the same: the idea of freedom to enter and leave alliances; not participating in other states’ wars; the emphasis on national sovereignty; the greatest possible freedom in making decisions; and consequently a pronounced unilateralism. Rejection of military interventions was by no means a necessary feature of isolationism, even if avoiding war, especially war in Europe, became the second pillar of the creed during the 1930s.

Traditionally a minority of about one American in five can be reckoned to the current of isolationism, in the sense of far-reaching abstention from world affairs. The predominant public mood in the United States can be interpreted less as a revival of isolationism than as a rejection of the imperial implications of Bush’s foreign policy, as the wish for the Administration to return to a more modest, more “traditional” internationalist foreign policy. Certainly, the proportion of Americans who think that in international affairs the United States should concentrate on looking after its own interests and leave other states to their own devices has risen to 41 percent. In 2002 only 30 percent shared that opinion. Now the values are at the highest levels ever reached, matched only in 1976 and 1995 (41 percent in each case). But is that

<sup>57</sup> “Stop the World, We Want to Get Off,” *The Economist*, November 17, 2005; “Americans Are More Isolationist, Poll Finds,” *International Herald Tribune*, November 18, 2005, 2.

<sup>58</sup> “America rejects the false comfort of isolationism,” said President Bush in the State of the Union Address on January 31, 2006, in which the words “isolationism” or “isolation” received four mentions.

<sup>59</sup> Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935–1941* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1966); idem, “Isolationism,” in *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy: Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas*, vol. 2, ed. Alexander DeConde, 496–506 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1978); Bear F. Braumoeller, *The Myth of American Isolationism*, mimeo (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Department of Government, n.d.); Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 39–56.

really an expression of isolationism? Does it not stem much more from discomfort over President Bush's foreign policy? Can the fact that the proportion who have a positive opinion of the United Nations has fallen to 48 percent (from 77 percent in 2002) be taken as evidence of growing isolationism when at the same time 84 percent of respondents say that they would like the partnership between America and Europe to return to the closeness it enjoyed in the past? It does not really suggest a mood of retreat when half of all Americans believe that the United States should retain its status as the sole military superpower (something over one third would be willing to accept another state becoming just as powerful as their own). Despite the experience in Iraq, from the public's perspective the logic of preventive war has not become obsolete: a narrow majority believes use of armed force to be justified against states that seriously threaten the United States but have not yet attacked.<sup>60</sup>

These shifts in public opinion reflect the fact that the unilateralist hegemonic strategy of the Bush Administration failed to match the collective preferences of an American public whose preference for a more cooperative internationalism had not been changed in any fundamental sense by the events of 9/11.<sup>61</sup>

## Back to the Basics of Liberal Hegemony?

The American foreign policy debate is not about relinquishing the international leadership role, but at its heart about how such a role can be institutionally secured and politically legitimized as liberal hegemony. That is admittedly a very pointed take on the current foreign policy discussion. But two prominent contributions—one from the pen of a (reformed) neo-conservative such as Francis Fukuyama, the other from that of a more traditional moderate Republican internationalist such as Richard Haass—very clearly

spotlight this search for (new) ways in which the international leading role of the United States can be preserved in a cooperative institutional framework.<sup>62</sup>

In broad terms, two versions of hegemonic foreign policy continue to compete with one another in the United States.<sup>63</sup> One is the unilateral version, after 9/11 almost imperial in inclination and enhanced with the element of democracy promotion; the other is the more liberal, multilateral school propagated by foreign policy experts close to the Democratic Party in the shape of a "progressive internationalism" building on the traditions of Wilson and Truman, which for all its multilateralism still stresses the willingness to use military might.<sup>64</sup> The intellectual proponents of a retreat to the role of a unilaterally acting balancing power (the "isolationist" label is misleading here) have for some time—since the end of the Cold War—been offering an alternative framework for a less ambitious foreign policy,<sup>65</sup> but their ideas put them at the margins of the debate; in the editorials and on the op-ed pages of the major elite newspapers and in policy journals the discussion takes place within the broad hegemonic paradigm.

If the interpretation laid out here is correct, then the question becomes even more urgent: how can this debate between proponents of different versions of hegemony be influenced from the outside in favor of the liberal multilateral understanding of America's leading role?

<sup>60</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "America's Place in the World 2005: Opinion Leaders Turn Cautious, Public Looks Homeward," Washington, D.C., November 17, 2005, [www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org).

<sup>61</sup> Although the willingness to approve the use of American ground forces had increased. Shoon Kathleen Murray and Christopher Spinosa, "The Post-9/11 Shift in Public Opinion: How Long Will It Last?" in *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence*, ed. Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick, 4th ed., 97–115 (100–105) (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

<sup>62</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006); Richard N. Haass, *The Opportunity: America's Moment to Alter History's Course* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

<sup>63</sup> For the structure and fundamental thrusts of the foreign policy discourse see Peter Rudolf, "New Grand Strategy? Zur Entwicklung des außenpolitischen Diskurses in den USA," in *Außenpolitischer Wandel in theoretischer und vergleichender Perspektive: Die USA und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, ed. Monika Medick-Krakau, 61–95 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1999); idem, "Weltmacht USA: Sicherheitspolitische Konzeptionen und Kontroversen," in *Internationale Politik im 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. Mir A. Ferdowsi, 147–62 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002).

<sup>64</sup> Such a policy is propagated above all by two think tanks close to the Democrats, the Progressive Policy Institute and the Center for American Progress. See for example, Ronald Asmus et al., "Progressive Internationalism: A Democratic National Security Strategy," November 30, 2003, [www.ppionline.org/specials/security\\_strategy](http://www.ppionline.org/specials/security_strategy).

<sup>65</sup> This line is promoted above all by the libertarian Cato Institute and in the columns of *The American Conservative*.



## As Much Cooperation as Possible, as Much Criticism as Necessary: Maxims of a Two-Track Policy

Foreign policy actions are very often based on uncertain causal assumptions about their possible effects. This also applies to *America policy*. It should, the argument goes, be guided by the plausible assumption that it is possible to exert outside influence on the international role of the United States, whether by directly influencing the choice of foreign policy options or indirectly in the sense that German and European positions are taken up by domestic actors and find a hearing in the American debate, and in that way influence the context in which foreign policy decisions are made.<sup>66</sup> After all, in the transatlantic relationship foreign policy conflicts (and only where there are open or latent conflicts, influence is required in order to promote one's own positions) are conducted within a web of relations that comes very close to the ideal type of "complex interdependence," where questions of military security do not predominate but instead many topics are on the agenda and the states are joined by diverse transgovernmental relations, while their societies are bound together by a close network of transnational relations.<sup>67</sup> Such a web of relations offers diverse possibilities to feed partners' positions into the American political process and build up negotiating leverage by linking different issues. Systematic studies that go deeper into the conditions under which the European allies succeed in influencing preferences and policies of the hegemon are rare. But at least under the conditions of the Cold War, this European influence was certainly not insignificant.<sup>68</sup>

If one follows the outlined hypothesis that outside influence is possible, then one would always have to ask: what is the effect of German and European positions on the political power game in the United

States? Which positions strengthen those forces in the United States—whether among Democrats or moderate Republicans—who would like to restore America's leading role in the mold of liberal hegemony, but who also need serious partners for an effective multilateralism? In the following, on the basis of the fundamental assumption that American policy is not immune to external influence, I argue that dealing with the United States requires a two-track approach combining cooperative support with critical distance.<sup>69</sup> Each strand is discussed in more detail in relation to an example of an important international problem.

### Cooperation and Support

Support for US foreign policy makes sense where allies can accompany and buttress American global leadership without compromising their interests and values. But why should the United States be supported in a role that it is willing to play anyway? If the hegemon shoulders most of the burden, why should other states not attempt as far as possible to minimize their costs, and go for "free-riding" where the United States takes on the leading role?

Three arguments speak for bolstering American leadership. Firstly, "paying the fare" is in one's own national interest when the leading power depends on the support of other states for the provision of collective goods. Secondly, cooperation as a junior partner in one field of policy can create negotiating clout in other areas and thus be used as part of an overall negotiating strategy for furthering one's own interests and positions. Thirdly and lastly, support can also enhance one's own credibility. If Europe wishes to become an international actor that is serious about implementing its ideas about global governance—even

<sup>66</sup> For example, when a group of European former foreign ministers joins a former US secretary of state to call on Bush to talk to Iran, that definitely offers a good opportunity to get the European voice heard. "Talk to Iran, President Bush," *International Herald Tribune*, April 26, 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 2d ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 23–37.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among Democracies: The European Influence on US Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>69</sup> These ideas correspond to what one British commentator recently summarized as follows: "The US alone can decide its future role. But Europeans can help, by becoming both more effective as allies and more united as critics. The world will not accept the US as master. But it still depends on US leadership, just as the Europeans remain its natural partners." Martin Wolf, "US Foreign Policy Needs 'Liberal Realism,'" *Financial Times*, June 13, 2006.

against American resistance in some areas—it has to prove the earnestness of this ambition even in cases where supporting the United States is objectively imperative but costly.

The question of the extent to which Europe is willing to allow itself to be integrated globally in the hegemonic role of the United States arises in particular with respect to East Asia and the rise of China.<sup>70</sup> China's rise transforms a region where the United States has for more than a century pursued the geopolitical goal of preventing the hegemony of any other power. This is also a region where the smoldering conflict over the status of Taiwan bears the danger of military confrontation. Precisely because the rise of China affects the United States and Europe to different extents it represents a challenge for the political management of transatlantic relations.

Europe's China policy follows the "liberal" integrative approach, which is based on two optimistic assumptions: that the process of integration will socialize China as a constructive international actor, and that economic modernization will also lead to political liberalization. The security dimension of China's rise has until very recently played hardly any role in Europe's political approach towards China. From the American perspective, the United States shoulders high costs on its own as the guarantor of stability in East Asia—a stability from which Europe profits enormously without itself bearing any of the burden. So the United States expects Europe to recognize the American role and respect American security interests. The open conflict over the planned lifting of the European arms embargo against China reflected this transatlantic divergence, as does the rather latent conflict over Chinese participation in the European Galileo satellite system.

The goal of the American strategy is to shape the international constellation in such a way that rational self-interest leads China to choose not to endanger the perspective of a cooperative long-term relationship with "the West." Integrating Europe in such a strategy naturally makes sense from the American point of view, and it also corresponds with long-term European strategic interests. One of the two goals of American China policy—namely, to integrate the country as a constructive international actor—coincides with Euro-

pean endeavors. The second goal of American China policy—to prevent regional hegemony in Asia—plays no discernible role in European policy. Nevertheless it would only be irreconcilable with European interests if China's rise to become a major political power were to find European support on the basis that this development could cause the emergence of a multipolar system. Although there is occasional talk in Europe about the desirability of a multipolar world order, little thought is usually given to what that would really mean for international politics and stability. These considerations lead to the conclusion that the European partners should fundamentally recognize American security concerns and avoid giving China any reason to believe that the West could be divided, for example in the case of a military confrontation over Taiwan.

## Criticism and Assertiveness

Conversely, a strategically reflected America policy must be ready to fight out conflicts with the United States in a sober and levelheaded way in those cases where American foreign policy threatens one's own security interests and closing ranks across the Atlantic would risk or even compromise one's own values. An independent, openly critical role could under certain circumstances not only be essential for security or moral reasons (example: watering down the ban on torture, Guantánamo). In the long term it could also serve to uphold domestic political backing for transatlantic relations, given that opinion polls leave no doubt that a great majority of Germans no longer perceive the United States as a guarantor of peace and security in the world, and there is no longer overwhelming approval for a strong international leading role for the United States.<sup>71</sup>

The German-American conflict over Iraq was at heart—and this is all too often overlooked when the German position is interpreted as being motivated primarily by domestic political considerations—about a divergence of interests and values.<sup>72</sup> The conflict revolved not only around whether an intervention was advisable or necessary for security reasons, but also

<sup>70</sup> For more detail on this, see Peter Rudolf, *Die USA und der Aufstieg Chinas. Die Strategie der Bush-Administration*, SWP-Studie 9/2006 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2006), [www.swp-berlin.org/de/common/get\\_document.php?id=1651](http://www.swp-berlin.org/de/common/get_document.php?id=1651).

<sup>71</sup> The German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia Di San Paolo, *Transatlantic Trends 2003*.

<sup>72</sup> On this see Peter Rudolf, "The Transatlantic Relationship: A View from Germany," in *Germany's Uncertain Power: Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic*, ed. Hanns W. Maull, 137–51 (Houndsmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

the question of the moral legitimacy of war. In the moral assessment of wars there are differences within Europe too; but between Germany and the United States there is a chasm, as the opinion polls very clearly show. This is particularly obvious in the answers to the question of whether under certain circumstances war is seen as necessary in order to obtain “justice.”<sup>73</sup>

A broader debate is also taking place in the United States about whether and to what extent the “old” norms for the use of military might should be adapted to account for new developments. This debate was originally provoked largely by the question of humanitarian intervention, which in the case of Kosovo could be interpreted as preventive military intervention. The attacks of 9/11—or rather, their predominant interpretation—not only set in motion a debate about the extent to which the concept of preemptive war needed to be reformulated, but also about whether preventive wars can be a legitimate means for eliminating hypothetical future threats. Those Americans who are uneasy about the unilateral use of military might, but at the same time want to see the old norms relaxed brought various proposals into the discussion: that intervention be tied to the fulfillment of various criteria, or that it should additionally be subject to institutional restrictions.<sup>74</sup>

By reformulating the doctrine of the “just war,” the Bush Administration has challenged widely shared normative convictions, not only in Germany. War is—to summarize the shift that has occurred under President Bush—justified not only for self-defense, but also for eliminating future hypothetical threats and for overthrowing tyrannical regimes.<sup>75</sup> This overturns the general premise—that has gained acceptance in the predominant ethical interpretation of the philosophy of just war since 1945—that war is always an evil that must be justified, and that the only possible justification for war apart from defense of the political sovereignty and territorial integrity of one’s own and

other states is “emergency assistance” in order to prevent large-scale humanitarian disaster (“humanitarian intervention”).

The Bush Administration has picked up an older version of the “bellum justum” doctrine, which has remained alive in the American discourse among conservative Catholic and Protestant moral theologians. If, however, the doctrine is stripped of its traditional deontological elements, which place limits on the purely utilitarian use of military power, then it easily turns into an ideological substrate that can be applied to justify any military intervention.<sup>76</sup>

The Bush Administration continues to speak of preemptive rather than preventive war. But arguments about new threats have been used to broaden and thus to dilute the term to a point where it has lost its original meaning of warding off an immediate threat, and has come to encompass the elimination of future potential threats.<sup>77</sup> The Bush Administration has thus accelerated the transformation of the normative framework for the justification of war that had been emerging for some time in the American political discourse: the weakening of the “preventive war taboo” through the postulation of an “anti-proliferation imperative” that also encompasses the preventive use of military power to eliminate the atomic weapons programs of “rogue states.”<sup>78</sup> Although the

73 The German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia Di San Paolo, *Transatlantic Trends 2004*, 17–19.

74 For example Lee Feinstein and Anne-Marie Slaughter, “A Duty to Protect,” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 1 (January/February 2004): 136–50; Allen Buchanan and Robert O. Keohane, “The Preventive Use of Military Force: A Cosmopolitan Institutional Proposal,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (2004): 1–22.

75 Jutta Brunnée and Stephen J. Toope, “Slouching towards New ‘Just’ Wars: The Hegemon after September 11,” *International Relations* 18, no. 4 (December 2004): 405–23 (quote p. 406).

76 Franklin Eric Wester, “Preemption and Just War: Considering the Case of Iraq,” *Parameters* 34 no. 4 (winter 2004–05): 20–39; Quinn Newcomb, “Redefining the ‘Just War’ Doctrine: Implications of the New American Foreign Policy Paradigm,” *Emerge – A Student Journal of International Affairs* 5 (January 2004): 83–103, [www.diplomatonline.com/pdf\\_files/npsia/volume%205%20archive%20\(2004\).pdf](http://www.diplomatonline.com/pdf_files/npsia/volume%205%20archive%20(2004).pdf).

77 For more detail, see Rudolf, *George W. Bushs außenpolitische Strategie* (see note 36), 21ff. After underlining the preference for diplomatic means in non-proliferation policy, the National Security Strategy of 2006 stresses the option of preventive warfare: “If necessary, however, under long-standing principles of self defense, we do not rule out the use of force before attacks occur, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack. When the consequences of an attack with WMD are potentially so devastating, we cannot afford to stand idly by as grave dangers materialize. This is the principle and logic of preemption.” The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, March 2006, 23. This is in fact the logic of a “preventive war.”

78 Although there was talk after 1945 about a preventive war against the Stalinist Soviet Union and also against Maoist China, these discussions actually demonstrated the strength of the taboo against conducting a preventive war that would contradict the American ethos. The North Korean nuclear crisis of the first half of the 1990s marked a watershed in this respect to the extent that the use of military force was

discussion about the Iraq war showed that the “anti-preventive war norm” still finds observance, the debates in Congress in particular show that its significance in the political system has diminished. As long as worries about nuclear weapons falling into the hands of “rogue states” remain so great, the “preventive war temptation” will be there.

So the normative divergence between the United States and Germany in assessing the legitimacy of war has by no means disappeared with the intervention in Iraq. It could become acrimonious again if the question of a military operation to destroy the Iranian nuclear program came to a head. In the long term it will not be possible to ignore this normative chasm for the sake of a well-meaning interest in good transatlantic relations. Germany could move toward the American position and follow the normative transformation initiated by the hegemon. That would mean dropping the fundamental rejection of preventive wars and, within NATO, attempting to develop shared criteria that would restrict such military deployments to truly exceptional cases.<sup>79</sup> For the United States this would mean restricting its own freedom of action and opening up to multilateral coordination. For Germany, this would require to turn its back on the ethics of peace it has adhered to since World War II.

A different approach would involve simply isolating this problem from the cooperative fields of transatlantic relations, keeping the respective conflicts out of multilateral institutions, and accepting that the two sides take different political and ethical positions.<sup>80</sup> In practical terms this would mean granting the United States a certain degree of unilateral freedom of action on the basis of its hegemonic position in the international system. That might perhaps be possible in

those cases where American intervention has no detrimental effect on German or European interests. But even then it would be difficult to “depoliticize” the question of war and peace in this way. The normative divergence with regard to the legitimacy of war consequently remains a challenge for America policy.

discussed in the United States without any reference to the normative problems and without any doubts as to the legitimacy of such a course of action. This section is based on the outstanding analysis by Scott A. Silverstone, “The Preventive War Taboo vs. the Anti-Proliferation Imperative: Contested Norms and Strategic Responses to Nuclear Proliferation,” (paper presented at the annual convention of the International Studies Association, March 22, 2006, San Diego). The quotes are from the title, p. 55 (“watershed”) and p. 75 (“preventive war temptation”).

<sup>79</sup> This was the proposal of Henry A. Kissinger and Lawrence H. Summers (co-chairs) and Charles A. Kupchan (project director), *Renewing the Atlantic Partnership: Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations* (New York, 2004), 18f.

<sup>80</sup> For discussion of this approach, see Andrew Moravcsik, “Striking a New Transatlantic Bargain,” *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 4 (July/August 2003): 74–89 (81f).

## Strategy Mix in Dealing with the United States

This fundamental twin-track concept – namely, supporting the leading role of the United States where it tends toward liberal hegemony, while resisting unilateral, imperial tendencies in American foreign policy that conflict with our own interests and values—means that Germany needs a strategically very conscious, differentiated America policy in the European setting: a policy that will have to be concretized in each issue area according to the specific problems, the constellation of interests and a cost-benefit analysis. Such a policy will consist of a strategy mix, a mixture of associative and dissociative approaches. Three basic strategic options can be distinguished in the treatment of individual issue areas in transatlantic relations. Analytically differentiating them can sharpen awareness for one's own possibilities to have an impact and to influence things.<sup>81</sup> In order to avoid misunderstandings, it has to be emphasized once again that the point of this discussion of options is not to recommend one single fundamental position toward the United States excluding alternative options, but to analyze different possibilities for dealing with the United States in specific conflicts—with the goal of optimizing influence.

### Closing Ranks

First of all there is the option of closing ranks with the United States. If US policies coincide with one's own interests, this will be the natural reaction. Closing ranks might also be appropriate if, in the absence of a fundamental divergence of interests, going along with US creates the opportunity to influence the details of a policy that is largely determined by the

United States. An example is the German participation in the Kosovo intervention. Cooperation with the United States and the other partners enabled the German government to credibly put forward some innovative ideas about ending the war and to play an active part in shaping the diplomatic process.<sup>82</sup>

Closing ranks can also take the form of “bonding” as is the case in the British-American relationship. Within the context of the traditional “special relationship,”<sup>83</sup> Great Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair was very keen to establish also a special personal relationship with US Presidents—first with Bill Clinton, then with George W. Bush—and, to this end, he refrained from publicly criticizing their policies. It has, however, become very obvious that this did not in fact gain him any notable influence on Bush's foreign policy.<sup>84</sup>

With the loss of the central geopolitical position it occupied during the Cold War, Germany has—and this is simply a fact that has to be acknowledged—lost the influence that this position once brought. Even very good personal relations between the heads of government of the two countries are not going to change anything fundamental about that.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> For a broader discussion of the strategic options available to states in their dealings with the United States, see G. John Ikenberry, *Strategic Reactions to American Preeminence: Great Power Politics in the Age of Unipolarity*, United States Central Intelligence (CIA), National Intelligence Council (NIC), July 28, 2003, web-posted October 10, 2003, [www.dni.gov/nic/PDF\\_GIF\\_2020\\_Support/2003\\_11\\_24\\_papers/ikenberry\\_StrategicReactions.doc](http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_GIF_2020_Support/2003_11_24_papers/ikenberry_StrategicReactions.doc); Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to US Primacy* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 109–217.

<sup>82</sup> On this, see Peter Rudolf, “Germany and the Kosovo Conflict,” in *Alliance Politics, Kosovo, and Nato's War: Allied Force or Forced Allies?*, ed. Pierre Martin and Mark R. Brawley, 131–43 (New York/Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2000).

<sup>83</sup> On the British-American special relationship, its problems, and the occasionally great frustrations on the British side, see Lawrence Freedman, “The Special Relationship, Then and Now,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 3 (May–June 2006): 61–73.

<sup>84</sup> Walt, *Taming American Power* (see note 81), 191ff.

<sup>85</sup> Walter Russell Mead has captured the essence of this change as follows: “The [Bush] administration was also right that America could no longer deal with the Europeans in the way it did during the Cold War, when Washington would go to any length to persuade Germany, in particular, to support whatever it was doing, because the Cold War essentially was about the future of Germany. German support was crucial to anything Washington wanted to do in Europe. The Bush administration was right to realize that in the new world, the Middle East is actually more important to the United States than anything going on in Europe. The administration cannot let its European policy trump or limit its Middle Eastern policy.” Walter Russell Mead, “American Grand Strategy in a World at Risk,” *Orbis* 49, no. 4 (fall 2005): 589–98 (596f).

## Soft Balancing

The second option is to uphold European positions and assert European interests against the United States.<sup>86</sup> In transatlantic economic relations, which are characterized by symmetrical interdependence, this option can even take the form of “hard balancing”: the threat of economic sanctions and their application in trade disputes. In all other issue areas, it will have to be “soft balancing.”<sup>87</sup> This can involve the use of international institutions to restrict the exercise of American power (or at least to gain influence on it), or the refusal to give international legitimacy to American actions or particular political concepts, for example the doctrine of preventive self-defense.<sup>88</sup> For ideological and domestic political reasons, the United States as a hegemonic power is to a certain degree dependent on such legitimacy, on international acceptance that American actions are appropriate.<sup>89</sup> In some cases, the debate in the United

States, and in the longer term foreign policy positions too, could be influenced via the detour of American society.<sup>90</sup> So in really important controversies, criticism must also be expressed with an eye to its public effect.

Through “soft balancing” it might perhaps even be possible to have a direct effect on foreign policy decision-makers. The Iraq controversy has made it very clear what political costs are associated with a contentious military intervention; in other similar situations, American politicians will have to include the disapproval of other states in their calculations.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, if Europe as a whole had supported the Iraq intervention and its underlying doctrine, this support—and this is of course nothing but counterfactual speculation—would have confirmed the premise of American action that other states would jump aboard the “bandwagon” as long as the United States only proceeded decisively enough.

Lastly, “soft balancing” can also mean taking an independent international lead in those areas of policy where the United States is for ideological or domestic political reasons unable or unwilling to pursue an active policy (as for some time in the case of the Iranian nuclear program) or where it tends to block international cooperation rather than constructively shape it (for example in fields of environmental or human rights policy). In the case of Iran, the European Union had learned the lesson of the Iraq conflict: in a matter where conflict with the United States is on the horizon, Europe has to take the initiative, and if possible avoid the situation that occurred before the Iraq war where it had to choose between showing solidarity with the American policy or opposing it. After initial inactivity in this policy field, the Bush Administration has been gradually drawn into the diplomatic initiative of the EU-3. In environmental policy and human rights we cannot speak of a complete abandonment of leadership by the United States.<sup>92</sup> In a series of

<sup>86</sup> This strategic option contains the three elements that Walt describes as “soft balancing,” “balking,” and “binding.” In his understanding, “soft balancing” means coordinated actions of other states with the goal of achieving an outcome different to the preferences of the United States. “Balking” is simply the refusal of a state to meet the demands of the United States and to cooperate with it, while “binding” means restricting American freedom of action by integrating the United States in international institutions. Walt, *Taming American Power* (see note 81), 126–52.

<sup>87</sup> I use the term more broadly than Robert Pape, who may not have coined it but was certainly responsible for disseminating it. He defines “soft balancing” as the use of non-military means to constrict the more powerful state’s use of military power. Robert A. Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States,” *International Security* 30, no. 1 (summer 2005): 7–45 (36). What interests me here is to lay out options for action rather than to analyze and explain actual actions, so I do not need to go into the debate conducted in the United States about whether the Bush Administration’s strategy provokes the formation of a countervailing power, whether particular behavior of other states, especially in the Iraq crisis, can be explained as “soft balancing,” or whether other factors do play a role here. For that debate see above all T. V. Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of Primacy,” *International Security* 30, no. 1 (summer 2005): 46–71; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “Hard Times for Soft Balancing,” *International Security* 30, no. 1 (summer 2005): 72–108.

<sup>88</sup> Irwin M. Wall, “The French-American War over Iraq,” *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 10, no. 2 (spring 2004): 123–39 (133).

<sup>89</sup> Kagan, “America’s Crisis of Legitimacy” (see note 41); for a thorough treatment of the problem of legitimacy in international relations, see Ian Clark, *Legitimacy in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>90</sup> Frank Schimmelfennig, “Jenseits von Gleichgewichtspolitik und Anpassung: Chancen und Grenzen transnationalen sozialen Einflusses,” *WeltTrends* 40 (fall 2003): 76–81.

<sup>91</sup> See the discussion in Tod Lindberg, “‘We,’” *Policy Review* 128 (December 2004/January 2005), [www.policyreview.org/dec04/lindberg.html](http://www.policyreview.org/dec04/lindberg.html).

<sup>92</sup> The United States played a leading role in the early years of international environmental policy in the 1960s and 1970s. Tanja Brühl, “Verweigerung statt Führung: Die internationale Umweltpolitik der USA,” in *Weltmacht ohne Gegner: Amerikanische Außenpolitik zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Peter Rudolf and Jürgen Wilzewski, 363–94 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2000).

agreements, including the one for the International Criminal Court, the United States did initially show leadership but ended up stalling, insisting on special exemptions for itself and refusing to abide by the rules that applied to all. When it is propelled by a small group of states that agree in their goals, non-hegemonic cooperation is possible within the framework of international organizations and through NGOs—at least in those areas where international cooperation is based above all on persuasion and the provision of resources.<sup>93</sup> But to organize international cooperation in fields where the observance of agreements has to be backed up by incentives and coercion there is often no substitute for the leadership of a hegemon.<sup>94</sup>

This raises the fundamental question of integrating the United States in international regimes: Should everything be done to involve the United States, even at the price of granting it special rights and privileges? Or should it be left out under certain circumstances in the interest of preserving the principle of equal rights and responsibilities? That is a question to be considered in each specific case. On the European side, there have been three different reactions to American reservations about and resistance to multilateral agreements: willingness to make considerable concessions and thus to find a compromise (e.g. the Kyoto protocol), postponement of negotiations (e.g. revision of the Kyoto protocol), and finally continuation of negotiations until agreement is found on a solution without American participation (e.g. International Criminal Court, Landmine Convention).<sup>95</sup> However, bracketing out the hegemonic power of the United States from international regimes also means doing without the hard and soft resources that could otherwise

strengthen the authority of an international regime.<sup>96</sup> Two things speak for an approach that leaves out the United States under certain circumstances: Even if special concessions are made to the United States, these are not necessarily enough to persuade the Senate to ratify. Secondly, in some cases the United States might broadly observe the standards that have been set internationally and gained a certain degree of acceptance. In the long run the United States cannot succeed in delegitimizing a body such as the International Criminal Court, to which more than one hundred states have now signed up, and the gradual political shift that has occurred under President Bush provides clear evidence of this. In practical terms, the Bush Administration now recognizes that the International Criminal Court has a role to play in the international legal system, even if it continues to regard any jurisdiction of the court over American citizens as unacceptable.<sup>97</sup>

### Conditional Cooperation

The third option is conditional cooperation. This can mean putting clear conditions on the willingness to follow American policy in order to persuade the US Administration to correct its course. This option could prove to be promising in cases where American policy cannot be realized without the cooperation of important allies. Especially in non-military fields, Europe has plenty to offer (or refuse), not least the resource of “legitimacy,” meaning European recognition for American actions.

Conditional cooperation can also take on the form of “linkage” strategies. Open or tacit linkages can be established within a policy field; for example in the case of Iran, European willingness to support sanc-

<sup>93</sup> The intention here is not to identify areas where such a leading role is necessary and possible. That would require a stocktaking of the gaps in the international regime structure and is beyond the scope of this conceptual study.

<sup>94</sup> Kendall Stiles, “Theories of Non-hegemonic Cooperation” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Honolulu, Hawaii, March 1–5, 2005). A hegemon is not necessarily required in order to ensure cooperation within existing regimes. This possibility of “post-hegemonic cooperation” is the central theme of Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>95</sup> Caroline Fehl, “Leben mit dem widerspenstigen Hegemon: Europäische Reaktionen auf den Unilateralismus der USA” (paper for the conference of the Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Wissenschaft, Sektion Internationale Politik, Mannheim, October 6–8, 2005).

<sup>96</sup> Richard Price, “Hegemony and Multilateralism,” *International Journal* (winter 2004–2005): 129–50.

<sup>97</sup> Its interest in prosecuting the crimes of Sudanese militias confronted the Administration with the choice of either accepting a legitimate role for the International Criminal Court or doing without prosecution at all. The European partners rejected the idea of setting up an ad-hoc court for Sudan on the grounds that in their view the International Criminal Court had been established for precisely such purposes. Because Sudan is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, the Security Council had to refer the case to the International Criminal Court. The United States refrained from using its veto to block this decision in the Security Council, instead abstaining. Jess Bravin, “US Warm to Hague Tribunal,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 2006, A4.

tions linked to substantial American support for the European diplomatic initiative. But two different policy fields can also be linked, strengthening one's own negotiating position on one issue through a willingness to give ground in another (a negotiating tactic that would however presuppose a considerable degree of internal coordination on the European side). Given the volume of issues that are dealt with in transatlantic relations, the possibilities for such linkages exist. And tactical linkages will theoretically be easier to make if cooperation can be consolidated in an institution where ongoing negotiations are conducted.<sup>98</sup> However, such a bundling of transatlantic relations is unlikely to occur, as the concluding discussion of the institutional framework will make clear.

<sup>98</sup> For a detailed discussion of the institutional context and the possibility of "tactical linkages," see Christina L. Davis, "International Institutions and Issue Linkage: Building Support for Agricultural Trade Liberalization," *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 1 (February 2004): 153–69.



## Modular Multilateralism? On the Changed Institutional Context of Policy toward America

The diagnosis is unambiguous: NATO has lost its earlier importance as the institutional linchpin of transatlantic relations. NATO is, as the then Chancellor Gerhard Schröder put it in February 2005, “no longer the primary venue where transatlantic partners discuss and coordinate strategies.”<sup>99</sup> A year later Chancellor Angela Merkel was less direct in addressing NATO’s decreased importance, but her vision of the alliance’s future makes it very clear what NATO is not at the moment: “In my view,” said the Chancellor, “it must be a body which constantly carries out and discusses joint threat analyses. It must be the place where political consultations take place on new conflicts arising around the world, and it should in my opinion be the place where political and military actions are coordinated.” NATO, she concluded, should be given the fundamental “primacy” in transatlantic cooperation. Only if it proves impossible to reach agreement within NATO, “other courses” should be explored.<sup>100</sup> As the coalition agreement of November 11, 2005, between the two Christian Democratic parties (CDU and CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD) shows, there really is a grand coalition for enhancing the role of NATO: “We are in favour of the Atlantic Alliance becoming the central forum of the transatlantic security policy dialogue, where the transatlantic partners consult each other and coordinate their strategic concepts on an equal basis.”

But can NATO really be revived as that unique institution that opened up opportunities for reciprocal influence on the crucial field of security policy?<sup>101</sup> That role was possible under the conditions of the Cold War, when transatlantic security relations focused almost exclusively on deterrence and détente

in relations with the Soviet Union, and West Germany formed the geopolitical front line. The geostrategic paradigm shift in American foreign policy is in full swing: in the short term focusing on the Middle East and the threat of terrorism, in the longer term moving toward East Asia. Europe is at peace, the conflicts in the Balkans at least contained. From the American perspective, Europe represents a growing security problem as a reservoir of Islamist terrorism,<sup>102</sup> but NATO is not the forum for cooperation and initiatives in this area.

The United States will certainly continue to be interested in using NATO to have its say in matters of European security and as a “toolkit” for its global policies. But in the two central regions of American security policy—the Middle East and East Asia—it will probably play only a minor role. Even if the transformation of the Middle East were after all yet to become the great identity-giving European-American project of the future—a hope sometimes raised in the American discussion—the role of NATO as a military alliance would be fairly marginal. What would be most likely to help it to regain the kind of centrality to American security policy it had during the Cold War would be a reconfiguration as a maritime alliance serving to contain a China striving for hegemony in East Asia.<sup>103</sup>

It is questionable whether a (in many respects very useful) security organization like NATO, based as it is on the constellation of a “dominant senior partner and various junior partners,”<sup>104</sup> can be transformed into the primary arena of transatlantic political consultation.<sup>105</sup> Within NATO it is often said that the institution should be “more political,” that it should become a forum for all security-related questions, and

<sup>99</sup> Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, speech at the 41st Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 2, 2005, [http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu\\_2005=&menu\\_konferenzen=&id=143&sprache=en&](http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu_2005=&menu_konferenzen=&id=143&sprache=en&).

<sup>100</sup> Chancellor Angela Merkel, speech at the 42nd Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 4, 2006, <http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=170&>.

<sup>101</sup> On the role of “old” NATO as the “unique institutional framework for the Europeans to affect American policies,” see Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among Democracies* (see note 68), 225.

<sup>102</sup> Frederick Kempe, “US Sees Europe as New Front against Islamists,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 2006, A8.

<sup>103</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, “How We Would Fight China,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 2005, [www.theatlantic.com/doc/prem/200506/kaplan](http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/prem/200506/kaplan).

<sup>104</sup> E. Wayne Merry, “Therapy’s End: Thinking beyond Nato,” *The National Interest* 74 (winter 2003/04): 43–50 (50).

<sup>105</sup> See the skeptical assessment of François Heisbourg, “Von der Atlantischen Allianz zur europäisch-amerikanischen Partnerschaft,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 38–39 (September 23, 2005): 3–8.

that it needs a new “discussion culture,”<sup>106</sup> but it is rarely asked why it has not matched this concept, or indeed why the classical NATO-centered “Atlantic multilateralism” has become eroded and whether it can be restituted in the old institutional form at all without the Europeans giving up their independent role.<sup>107</sup> The reason why NATO has avoided discussion of controversial strategic political issues cannot be solely explained by the structures and decision-making processes that allow little time for discussion of strategic questions.<sup>108</sup>

Concrete coordination of important policy questions increasingly takes place, it would appear, within small, informal groups: in the framework of a *concert* of the most important powers and organizations. In Balkans policy this is the Contact Group, composed of the United States, France, Great Britain, Germany, and Russia; in the Middle East the Quartet comprising the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations; in Iran the EU-3 in close coordination with the United States and now also the P5+1 (= the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany).<sup>109</sup> The latest idea to enter the German discussion—of reviving NATO politically by founding a “core group” made up of a small number of states—corresponds to the same logic of cooperation within smaller informal groups.<sup>110</sup> If political strategies are

to be coordinated across the Atlantic and if agreement is to be achieved on the deployment of political and economic resources, then function-specific contact groups in which the EU is represented are probably the most appropriate framework. The formal European-American summits are definitely no substitute for regular policy coordination.<sup>111</sup>

For all the proclamations of the important political role of NATO, a *de facto modular multilateralism* is beginning to appear in transatlantic relations. These new multilateral forms possess only weak institutional contours, but they allow a certain degree of policy coordination and make the participants accountable to one another to some extent. This may not go much further than the duty to keep one another informed, and does not involve any reciprocal approval mechanism. Nonetheless, these informal forums retain the essence of multilateralism.<sup>112</sup> A new multilateralism such as this, made up of complementary, overlapping, sometimes competing, sometimes very informal institutions, will increasingly become the framework within which Germany has to shape its dealings with the sometimes difficult—but very often indispensable—hegemon.

**106** Michael Rühle, “Transatlantische Sicherheit zwischen Nato und EU,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, October 24, 2005, 4.

**107** A useful distinction between three dimensions of post-1945 multilateralism—global multilateralism, Atlantic multilateralism, and European multilateralism—is made by John Van Oudenaren, “Transatlantic Bipolarity and the End of Multilateralism,” *Political Science Quarterly* 120, no. 1 (2005): 1–32 (2f).

**108** This was very clearly expressed by NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, who would like a stronger “culture of debate”; see his lecture on “Global Nato?” at the Clingendael Institute, October 20, 2004.

**109** On this development, see Christoph Schwegmann, *Kontaktgruppen und EU-3-Verhandlungen. Notwendige Flexibilisierung Europäischer Außenpolitik*, SWP-Aktuell 62/2005 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, December 2005), [www.swp-berlin.org/de/common/get\\_document.php?id=1529](http://www.swp-berlin.org/de/common/get_document.php?id=1529).

**110** On the proposal for a core group see Helga Haftendorn, “Das Atlantische Bündnis als Transmissionsriemen atlantischer Politik,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 38–39 (September 23, 2005): 8–15. The model is the Group of Four in which the United States, Great Britain, and France discussed German reunification and the status of Berlin together with West Germany, but also addressed other foreign policy issues. The question of membership of such a “core group” and other flexible groups would probably be extremely delicate within NATO.

**111** See the arguments of Ivo Daalder, Nicole Gnesotto, and Philip Gordon, “A Common US–European Strategy on the Crescent of Crisis,” in idem (eds.), *Crescent of Crisis: US–European Strategy for the Greater Middle East* (Washington, D.C. and Paris: Brookings Institution Press/European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2006), 219–41 (240f).

**112** On this and on the term “modular multilateralism,” see Seyom Brown, *Multilateral Constraints on the Use of Force: A Reassessment* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, March 2006), [www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil](http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil).

Francis Fukuyama means something similar when he writes of “multi-multilateralism” in *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven, CT et al.: Yale University Press, 2006).