



# STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

*Adequatio intellectus et rei*

## **The New World Order**

### **The Debate on the Future: The Issues**

**AUTHOR**

Paulo DUARTE

May 2014

Americans have reason to be interested in possible threats to their hegemony in this new century. In other words, while the decline of America continues, other actors seem to emerge. In addition to the United States, the famous Palmerstonian pentarchy includes: "Russia, China, India and Japan". In this form of power for the 21st century, "Europe has disappeared [...]" while Asia focuses attention (Schmiegelow Partners, 2008: 21).

Indeed, if one takes a look at the "recent growth rates of the two most populous nations of the world, China and India" as well as their enormous potential "labour, territory and capital", we see how important Asia is (Schmiegelow, 2006: 10). As Henrik Schmiegelow points out, the Asian integration and development model seems to practice "more consistently than America a philosophy which is (in fact) American: the philosophy of pragmatism" (2006: 18).

Obviously, we cannot say anything with certainty because actors are always unpredictable, despite the knowledge of experts in international relations. Among several currents of thought, we would emphasise the debate between supporters of the continuity of multilateralism and those who defend a turn into unilateralism. These two currents are important in what concerns the theme of American (relative) decline. In fact, if the United States adopts a more unilateralist attitude (and therefore selfish), its power will tend to erode. This, perhaps more quickly, than if they had chosen to cooperate with the international powers and institutions.

We will return to this theme later. We will first discuss why European allies have let Americans act unilaterally after September 11. This debate here will also help us understand a little more the Americans' character and their so militarist tendencies. Obviously, excessive expenditure on armaments and wars can carry in them the seed of the internal weakening and lead ultimately to the relative decline. In this regard, Battistella says that "costs involved in the policing penalise the preponderant power" (2006: 292).

### ***Europe and the United States: two different visions of the world***

Where was Europe when the American power was injured by September 11? Where were the Europeans at the moment when the United States needed them? The answer is found, for example, in Robert Kagan, when he says that "it is time to stop doing as if Europeans and Americans shared the same vision of the world or even if they were living on the same planet" (2003: 9).

We can only understand the Europe's 'inaction' by its psychology and its context. In fact, Europeans like peace and multilateralism. They want to solve their problems through diplomacy and law, in cooperation with the various actors. At the same time, this way of seeing the world fits well into Kant's ideal of "eternal peace" that contrasts with the Hobbesian "anarchy" (Kagan, 2003: 9).

This last is rather the world where Americans live, a planet where reigns the chaos and where they believe to be the only ones able to eliminate by force. Furthermore, hobbesian systems are hardly compatible with multilateral strategies, which are doomed to failure in an anarchic world (Almeida, 2003: 4). The Americans are suspicious of others, of their willingness to cooperate, of diplomacy. For example, the United Nations becomes a useful institution sometimes, but also an obstacle to circumvent, by unilateralism (Iraq is a good example).

The Americans design the world in terms of calculations, they try to predict the behaviour of suspicious nations, as well as the best strategy to annihilate the opponent and expand their hegemony. It is not surprising that Americans were afraid because they seek it through an aggressive foreign policy towards the weakest. As said by Barber, "fear is the only weapon of terrorism, but it is far more powerful against those who live in hope and prosperity than against those who are languishing in despair and have nothing to lose" (2003: 21).

If Europe and the United States rise from "two different worlds", as we have just seen, it should be noted that Europeans may differ among them in the area of international relations. It is the same among Americans. Thus, the French defend the point of view that for the world to be stable, we should create a multipolar system able to provide resistance to American hegemony. But the English believe that relations between Europe and the United States should be strengthened to prevent any American unilateralism and to ensure global stability (Laidi, 2003).



Source: ingeniouspress.com

In conclusion, Americans and Europeans seem to be facing areas where they disagree, including foreign policy: choice between multilateralism and unilateralism, between recourse to law and diplomacy or to force. Certainly, all want peace, but the methods to achieve it differ: unlike Europeans, the Americans are likely to often use the war to have peace.

Moreover, the geographical configuration also helps to explain the differences in points of view regarding what the Europeans and Americans consider as new threats. As such, Kagan says: "Americans have an unreasonable demand for total security, no doubt because they have lived for centuries protected by two oceans. On the other hand, the Europeans, they know what it is to live with evil, because that is what they have done for centuries" (2003: 51).

But no matter their natures and their challenges, Europe and America cannot do without one another. The economic power, on one side, completes military force on the other. The links between them are favourable not only to themselves, but also to the global system that needs stability and a leader. And if Europe does not truly have a military force, as is the case of Japan, it has influence. On the other hand, if it comes from "Venus", as Kagan believes, then it has a particular sensitivity, capable of guiding its American ally to a better perspective for the future (2003: 51).

### *Unilateralism*

Some authors defend that in the framework of the new world order the United States must concentrate primarily in its internal affairs and resist any multilateralism, except in the case where American interests would be in danger. It's pure and hard unilateralism that aims to satisfy only the American aims, including its expansionist, i.e., imperialist goals.

The impact of the attacks of September 11 dismissed doubts about the 'unilateralism versus multilateralism' debate, since the majority of analysts are inclined to assert that the United States took a more unilateral stance in its foreign policy.

In this sense, the Iraqi offensive only represents the first step of "the new great imperial strategy of the Bush Administration" which aims "to dominate the world and destroy any power which tries to defy it (the USA) (Chomsky, 2004). Moreover, the old idea of "acting multilaterally when possible, but unilaterally if necessary", which was repeated by Madeleine Albright (as Ambassador of the United Nations), shows to what extent the Americans are willing to pursue this strategy (in Chomsky, 2004: 199).

However, the allied states (with the exception of England, for example), as well as a large percentage of the American and international public opinion (not to say the majority), do not share the same goals as Uncle Sam.

In this context, one may wonder if the Iraqi lesson is not, ultimately, a model of "selective cooperation" that Richard Haass believes to be the pillar of relations between the United States and

its allies in the 21st century. Everything indicates so. Indeed, the allies seem to have other concerns than imperialism and security, so dear to Washington, which explains that in this new century "formal alliances will be still less". In addition, in the new international order there will not be "permanent allies" or "permanent opponents" but only "permanent interest" (Schmiegelow Partners, 2008: 7).

However, unilateralism is not only limited to the issue of September 11 and its after-effects. It is also present when the Americans refuse to sign the Kyoto Protocol, the arms reduction agreements or to accept and support the rules and institutions regarding major issues of international concern. Unilateralism dreads and is hostile to any idea of rule or oppressive regulation. But sometimes it is not only negative: "it can play [...] a useful role in the creation of new international institutions because it's often necessary that someone gives the example and jumps into the water first" (Nye, 1992: 231).

### ***What is multilateralism? -The United States in the new world order***

In this context of pursuit of interests that do not receive the consent of the allies, it is legitimate to ask if multilateralism still has the chance to survive in the new order. Yes, certainly say the advocates of this approach by highlighting the many cases where the United States, renouncing its isolationism, cooperated in the construction of a better world. If one thinks, for example, of NATO or the United Nations we see there evidence that Americans have, for several years, engaged in cooperation (Almeida, 2003). In this sense, multilateralism is something characteristic in the identity of the United States and that one cannot simply erase no matter any new challenge.

How will the United States position itself in the future? In fact, it still has the opportunity to tell the world it is present by force or to wait for the world, itself, to recognise its power. It can also choose between fighting alone against terrorism and anarchy and cooperating with other countries. But as Brzezinski explains, "we have entered an era where the aspiration for national security in isolation is a chimera". Isolated, the Americans may not have the strength to endure the "resentment and envy" (2004: 282). Or, as Nye says, "wanting to decide everything alone for the whole planet is perhaps getting the triumphs in foreign policy, but this is not enough to solve the myriad of problems impossible to treat unless through international cooperation" (1992: 228).

Indeed, the supporters of a multilateral attitude defend that it is the American interest to accept and support the rules and institutions that were designed to fight terrorism, AIDS, drug trafficking, poverty, and other major issues and transnational challenges.

The interests of the United States may also coincide with those of many other countries and vice versa. Selfish, they will fall in the end; cooperative, they will sow a better future for themselves and for others. The success of the U.S. strategy will be even more notorious if others understand where America wants to go, what it will do and how it wants to do it.

### ***The possibility of coexistence between unilateralism and multilateralism***

In conclusion, if September 11 reinforced the American unilateralism, it would nevertheless be simplistic to consider the future American foreign policy only in unilateral or multilateral terms. In fact, nothing prevents these two characteristics from complementing each other.

On the other hand, the United States should realise that it is no longer the superpower it once was but, on the contrary, it is one great power among others. This means that its action, to be effective, must be framed and helped by the action of other major states (it can no longer continue to operate unilaterally as in the past because the power has changed).

Cooperation must be done with "major regional powers", such as the couple "Franco-German in Europe, Russia in Eurasia, China and perhaps Japan in Southeast Asia, India in South Asia, [...]" (Huntington, 1988/89: 5). But it must be also done with any other power, as soon as there is the willingness to engage on the path of peace and prosperity.

If one prefers to talk in terms of 'polarity', perhaps we could say that the current international system has both unipolar and multipolar characteristics. This means that the world is "unipolar from the military point of view" and it is at the same time "multipolar from the economic and especially cultural point of view" (Hassner, 2003: 63). These two characteristics, despite their differences, "can perfectly coexist" especially in a context where power and actors are complex and unpredictable.



Source: politicalanalysis.info

### ***China: a threat to American hegemony?***

Unpredictable and complex is, for example, the Chinese case. China feeds the Americans with products, but on the other hand, it is not unhappy to see the United States declining. In this sense, China is possibly complicit in American 'euthanasia', because it only meets Washington demand of consumption. But, in doing so, not only it allows the economic 'suicide' of the United States, as it also benefits from it (Keck, 2014).

China has a very large potential to become a superpower. Despite the internal problems that it undergoes, the country occupies a huge territorial dimension, counts on a huge workforce and sees its economy to grow at an accelerated pace. Furthermore, the fact that China is able to raise about 300 million of soldiers and increasingly modernises its army, explains that its military power cannot be neglected in the event of a possible conventional or nuclear war (Bertonha, 2008).

In short, as long as the United States sees its economies weaken, China seems to wake up. And, if one recalls the old phrase "When China wakes up, the world will tremble", then one realises that this country could move from the status of threat (to any other power), to a situation where it will equal or replace the United States<sup>1</sup>.

What is, then, necessary for China, with its demographic, cultural, economic, military and diplomatic potential, to show that it has awakened? It is just a matter of time, if we keep, obviously, all other constant factors. Because, as Bertonha says, "China is, among the potential candidates to the superpower status (European Union, Russia, India, Japan, Brazil), that which must face the fewest obstacles" (2008: 34). It is not necessary to remember that nothing is certain and that several authors have many and different opinions about the future of the world order. But one thing remains certain: China is there and you cannot ignore or underestimate it.

<sup>1</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte predicted, in 1804: "*Quand la Chine se éveillera, le monde tremblera*". Alain Peyrefitte wrote in 1973 a book called «*Quand la Chine se réveillera, le monde tremblera*». For further knowledge on this subject see [http://www.chine-informations.com/actualite/quand-la-chinese-reveillera-le-monde-tremblera\\_2421.html](http://www.chine-informations.com/actualite/quand-la-chinese-reveillera-le-monde-tremblera_2421.html)

Finally, we can say that the status that China will have acquired according to the events, will then dictate its behaviour: whether to continue to cooperate with the Americans. According to George W. Bush, "China is not a strategic partner anymore but rather a strategic competitor", which shows how it is perceived as a danger to the United States (Bertonha, 2008: 34). But it is also regarded as a "potential threat to its neighbours if we consider, for example, the "ideological differences" or "power rivalries", this according to Michèle and Henrik Schmiegelow (2007: 17).

## Conclusion

Just like the great empires of history, the United States, may also fall. When? Nobody knows. The author of *Naissance et déclin des grandes puissances* is clear on the question of whether the United States can maintain its current situation "[...] not because it was never given to any society to maintain on top permanently, because it would mean that it freezes differences in growth rate, in technological and military developments that have existed for a very long time" (Kennedy, 1989: 591). Various factors prevent us from stating that this decline will be absolute. Indeed, we need only to remember the geographic size, the number of inhabitants or the resources possessed by the United States. This set is quite significant and powerful to enable the United States to occupy a position of weight no matter the power upheavals in the political scene.

While the system is becoming multipolar, this does not mean that the USA will dilute in a complex game of actors, losing its singularities. Nevertheless, it will be less strong than today but more powerful than any other country considered individually. In this context, the question of whether the United States is in decline must now give way to the real question: who will replace it in this new century? Only future will tell but, for the moment, there are already a few 'candidates' to this place: China, Japan, India or Russia. Of course that the European Union must certainly not be overlooked, despite the fact that some, such as the American Palmerstonians, have not included it in the pentarchy of the 21st century. It is certainly economically powerful (and, we must add, militarily weak), such as Japan, but it is China which seems to concentrate all the attention. When this huge country wakes up, it can then shake not only the Americans, heavily dependent on it, but the world.

As Zaki Laidi says, "considering China's potential, Russia and India's ambitions we will see [...] that it is not impossible that the world order of the 21st century is marked by the return of the logic of power". If this is true, it is not surprising that the Americans see their hegemony threatened in a multipolar world. They will then try to do everything to "prevent challengers" to their power (Laidi, 2003: 22). It is thus legitimate to think that if China becomes more powerful (as indeed current indicators suggest), it will want to have a word to say on regional and even global affairs. This explains that the relationship between the two giants, the United States and China, can range from cooperation to conflict. Taiwan is also a focal point in the relationship between the two powers, but this does not mean that, despite the challenge, the two countries would be actually willing to use nuclear weapons. In such a way that China is well aware of the importance of maintaining such a special 'client' which allows it to develop its economy.

## Bibliography

ALMEIDA, João, *Hegemonia americana e multilateralismo*, *Espaço online de Relações Exteriores*, 2003, [http://www.janusonline.pt/2003/2003\\_2\\_1\\_7.html](http://www.janusonline.pt/2003/2003_2_1_7.html)

BARBER, Benjamin, *L'Empire de la peur : terrorisme, guerre, démocratie*, Paris: Fayard, 2003, 281p.

BERTONHA, João, O Equilíbrio de Poder do Século XXI, 16/04/2008, <http://groups.google.com/group/prep-riobranco/topics>

HASSNER, Pierre, *Washington et le monde: Dilemmes d'une superpuissance*, Editions Autrement, 2003, 170p.

HUNTINGTON, Samuel, *The U.S. - Decline or Renewal?*, *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1988/89, <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19881201faessay7927/samuel-p-huntington/the-u-s-decline-or-renewal.html>

KAGAN, Robert, *La puissance et la faiblesse : les Etats-Unis et l'Europe dans le nouvel ordre mondial*, Paris: Plon, 2003, 160p.

KECK, Zachary, 2014, America's Relative Decline: Should We Panic?, *The Diplomat*, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/americas-relative-decline-should-we-panic>

KENNEDY, Paul, *Naissance et déclin des grandes puissances: transformations économiques et conflits militaires entre 1500 et 2000*, Paris: Payot, 1989, 730p.

LAIDI, Zaki, La question multipolaire, *CERI/CNRS*, septembre 2003, <http://www.cerisciencespo.com/archive/sept03/artzl.pdf>

NYE, Joseph, *Le leadership américain: quand les règles du jeu changent*, Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1992, 266p.

SCHMIEGELOW, Henrik, *How 'Asian' will Asia be in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?*, *Policy Analysis*, July 2006, <http://www.schmiegelowpartners.com/download/HSHowAsianAsien.pdf>

SCHMIEGELOW, Michèle & Henrik, *The road to an Asian Community*, *Policy Analysis*, winter 2007, [http://www.schmiegelowpartners.com/download/IPGe\\_4Schmiegelow.pdf](http://www.schmiegelowpartners.com/download/IPGe_4Schmiegelow.pdf)

SCHMIEGELOW Partners, *How should the Atlantic Community view the Asian Community*, *Policy Analysis*, January 2008, <http://policyanalysis.wordpress.com/>