

CONTEMPORARY GLOBALIZATION IMPACTING NATION-STATES.

A NEW WORLD DISORDER?

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ABSTRACT

Studying international relations exclusively as inter-state interactions has been made obsolete by globalization. The nation state continues to play a major role on today's world stage, despite the current strategic realities can be a-territorial, compelled by contradictions between diverse territorial logics or “traditional” nation-state based. Globalization refers to a transcontinental or inter-regional spatial transformation and international trade; many people remain nonetheless attached to their states. For most states, globalization accentuates the feeling of being “exposed” and drives them to join into institutionalized political bodies promising a kind of collective independence. Conversely, large international institutions are well advanced on the road to autonomy. Their powers remain however limited. From sociological point of view projected to geo-politics the changing landscape of forces guides to raise the issue: Yet, today it is still possible to talk about one dominant nation, the United States, even though one can believe that the economic slowdown reflects a future political decline.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the World War Two witnessed a rise to power of nation states and entry into a short period of ‘limited sovereignty’ that was closed by the beginning of the Cold War. Competition between military and ideological blocs led to confrontation and ferocious rivalry. At about this time emerged the following paradox related to the theory of geopolitical conflicts : Nation state appears to be too small to project authority onto the global scene, while it is too big to allow all its constituent communities to express a collective identity, for example, the right to linguistic or religious independence. The state often claims a monopoly

on legitimate violence within its borders, though unable to do so without creating a network of transnational cooperation.

Thirty years later Morin (2002) underlines that the world-society under construction lacks the checks and balances of an organized society (laws, rights, control), whereas supranational organizations seem yet incapable of providing the necessary regulation. On the one hand, those organizations are deficient in an army and international police force. On the other hand, they do not manage to make available democratic expression of the largest extent of world population groups with various and eventually divergent interests and values. To sum up, for E Morin (2002), we have the infrastructures, but not the superstructures. Over the last decade,

[...] new social forces are emerging among environmentalists, women, indigenous peoples, peace activists, churches, labor unions, and other groups, to protest and organize against the less beneficial aspects of globalization. Consciousness of the global and local scales at which they must organize [...] marks these contemporary movements as parallel phenomena to the economic globalization (Agnew, 2001, p.149).

We denote an ability to encourage and to support the democratic expression on the largest scale as a national or even “international” consciousness. Permanent world-wide arena of public opinion, provided among the nation-states by supranational organizations, should ideally take into account justifiable interests of various social groups, professions, ethnics... Such discussion mechanisms were designed for keeping, protecting and extending dynamic and harmonious development of world-society, eventually by the means of negotiation and regulative collective action.

How can geopolitics be conceived in the era of globalization? Macro-sociological perspective, intended to abstract of regional specificities and aimed at comprehension of what allies today's various trends in geo-strategic relations, leads to ask how the roles of states and supranational bodies do link up in the context of globalization. Through an overview of French sociological and geopolitical literature, the paper emphasizes the actual amalgam of ambivalent forces and actors on the global scale. Rather than a New World Order (Jacques

Welch by Lowe, 2001) a new type of World Disorder (*The Economist*, 2007, January 6th, p.7) interconnects and influences Nation-states, international organizations and state groupings. Emerging from an idealistic, but stimulating idea of universal democracy on a global scale, the neo-liberal framework seems sometimes misused being applied indiscriminately as an end in itself. In this case, prejudice ranked as truth over unquestioned fact and the simplistic logic does more damage than ignorance (Knight, 1967). Dogmatism of concepts often contradicts the common sense of economic and social action, leading to more inequality, more poverty and more violence instead of reducing them.

In the first section we argue that the nation state, extensively transforming into a myth, continues to play a major role on today's world stage, despite the current strategic realities can be a-territorial, compelled by contradictions between diverse territorial logics or, decreasingly, "traditional" nation-state based. An old order cannot be restored. The scope of state power is changing and new forms of violence generate new fears of conflict. If contemporary globalization refers to a transcontinental or inter-regional spatial transformation and all countries are engaged in international trade, indicators of migration and mobility show also that economic integration is not global and many people remain attached locally or nationally to their states.

The second section emphasizes the difficulties that globalization accentuates for most states creating the feeling of being "exposed". As in the case of the 'Brussels cartel', states may join into institutionalized political bodies that promise a kind of collective independence when facing the new world disorder. Or, in other words, by forming these regional groupings, nation states intend to survive rather than dissolve in a larger entity sharing the benefits of solidarity. In contrast, large international institutions are well advanced on the road to autonomy. Their powers remain however limited, contrary to the usual beliefs. From sociological point of view projected to geo-politics, the changing landscape of political and

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economic forces leads to posing the following issue: What level of human consciousness would allow establishing a world-society?

In the third section we emphasize the role of the United States, once creator and promoter of universal democracy, in today's world. Studying international relations exclusively as inter-state interactions has been made obsolete by globalization. Yet, today it is still possible to talk about one dominant nation, the United States, even though one can believe that the economic slowdown reflects a future political decline (see, for example, Smith, 2005, Kennedy, 1989).

1. ROLE AND POWER OF NATION STATE

1.1. THE LEGACY OF THE COLD WAR

Post World War Two reconstruction was largely a product of government intervention.

The welfare state built itself around various poles: as an alternative to local community cohesion, by the controlled development of capitalism through nationalization, economic and town planning. All these factors can be examined in the context of a rejection of war and the promotion of a democratic ideal. As Senarclens (2001) wrote at the time: "Democracies aim to extend state control." Still, so far nation states have never seceded in insuring total "sovereign" control over their territory.

Through the imposing of a common language, the teaching of a truly national history and the upkeep of numerous customs, the nation state was always striving for a common cultural identity (Noiriél, 1995). But the sovereignty of states was always bounded by sovereignty of other states, by international agreements, or by the universal vocations of the great religions, whether Roman Catholicism or Islam. Kymlicka (1995) shows, for example, that in the USA, the liberal political model has never been literally applied on a nationwide basis. Certain religious groups have long had special rights, such as the Amish, who do not

send their children to school. Jewish and Armenian libraries, cultural associations and schools obtain public funding. Similarly, Schnapper (2001) demonstrates that such policies of assimilation had not stopped the reexamination of national and ethnic origins or the combining of exile and national identities, both real and imagined. The recent example of a United States president acting as an intermediary between Irish and British governments in the name of Irish-Americans, confirms the extent of this new kind of what might be called inter-state involvement.

The ability of states to wield power is transforming and a new geopolitical landscape appears. Less and less dependent on the limitations of military force alone, state power relies more and more on networks of influence and control of financial flows.

The safest type of dependency can now be found in the cross-border resonance of practices: there is no need for a physical presence in these supposedly independent countries once in a position to influence the culture, institutions and economic activity of those who live there and those who believe themselves to have power. Clientelism and importation replace occupation and colonization: the recipe is cheaper, as well as safer (Badie, 1995).

In the same vein, Badie (1995) talks of a strategy where states and borders are literally avoided. The data revolution has created an infinite number of cross-border links and contacts, untrammelled by frontiers, making it more and more difficult for permeable democratic states to maintain a coherent foreign policy.

The state as an instrument of political control over individuals' minds is progressively losing credibility, due to the decrease of state's capacity of projecting shared values. The state is therefore losing its historical roles of the provider for national security and of a logistical and political support for military operations. "We are leaving a world where violence was highly institutionalized for one where it is individualized. Our western-style societies are at the same time tolerant at the level of institutions, and crude and violent at the level of

individual behavior” (Touraine, 1997, p. 443). Thus, the widespread clandestine emigration avoids visa requirements, censuses, military service or institutional supervision. The extent of such migratory movements and their restructuring impact on the principle of territoriality complicate foreseeing, judging and punishing.

Identifying a new geopolitical redistribution, we question the resemblance of globalization to historical phase of political, cultural and social interdependence between territories, which overlap without necessarily superimposing their principles of political legitimacy.

1.2. THE REGULATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

From 1945 and the San Francisco order onwards, the ideal of world peace, founded on the design of universal legal norms, the declaration of the right of peoples to self-determination and a decolonization process speeded by the USA and USSR, seemed to be widely shared by most states. Amongst others, this ideal was inspired by Hobbesian vision of law that must be backed by force; otherwise a lack of strong central government would incite a constant war of states, obsessed with self-interest in return to the “state of nature”.

The USA declared itself the mainstay of the defense of the free world and, via the institutions of the United Nations, promoters of Third World development. However the proxy wars, that might be perceived as a strategy of avoiding generalized conflict, quickly replaced the ideal of universal peace. The Cold War displaced the geography of ideological conflicts out of the “developed” nations through the struggle for control over colonies (For example, France in Indochina or Algeria) or spheres of influence. Projecting the fight of “ideological poles” for the control of natural resources and political power, “peripheral conflicts” multiplied in more “developing” states: Vietnam, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Israel and Palestine... This period displays also the frequent sidelining of the Security Council. The superpowers’ veto places them above the law and free from sanctions, as can be seen in the

USA's intervention in Korea in 1950 and most of other “peripheral conflicts”. The UN appears above all to work along the lines of creating an ideological and prescriptive space of passionless debates, commissions of inquiry, diplomatic mediation and periodic “peace-keeping” operations after 1956 (Sénarclens, 1988). They permanently support government of all shades. Used as a sounding board invoking the ideal of universality, UN provide a dubious legitimacy to national interests through a system of codified diplomatic procedures: a whole ritual “machinery” of meetings and negotiations, through an army of international officials was created.

Since 1979, the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran gives rise to an ideology radically challenging the structures of the international system. This ideology rejects the secular state and the jurisdiction of international law. In Iran, the distinction is formally made between the realm where God's law is applied (*"dar al-islam"*) and the rest of the world, the home of war (*"dar al-harb"*), which has to be converted by the Holy War (*"Jihad"*). Hence, no legal criterion is able to define the Nation and no court is able to protect it. At that time, proxy wars contributed their share to the emergence of modern terrorism. For its part, the United States applauds the arrest of Milosevic, supports the Iraqi Kurds, frees Afghanistan from Taliban rule, seeks to intervene everywhere to wipe out the terrorist threat... but denies the jurisdiction of the international courts over its own citizens.

“Peripheral conflicts” are actually becoming in a way more “central”, especially those, which involve the multiplying “nuclear club” countries like North Korea, Iran, Pakistan, or the former Soviet republics awash with weapons from USSR days. As a huge web of potential disorder, globalization exacerbates this phenomenon. Henceforth, there will be “residual” conflicts that can be almost ignored and “strategic” ones having direct global impact through the public opinion such as Palestine, potential instability in South East Asia or the Balkans powder keg. In this context, the UN increasingly becomes a formal arena for inter-power

negotiations, especially since the coming to power of Russia's new regime and China's economic growth are transforming the world economy balance. The UN "space" has been often "paralyzed" by the multitude of states of unequal size and influence, theoretically all with the same right to take the floor. Yet, an international ground for public discussion has been created, raising issues of sovereignty, self-determination of peoples, the right to economic development, etc. Is it one more proof of hesitant progress in the development of a proper framework for international relations?

2. STATE GROUPINGS

As is well known, globalization benefited from political decisions of sovereign states. For example, in Europe neither an opening up of markets nor a common currency in the Euro would be possible without the priority given by national governments and legislatures to competitive counter inflationary measures. At the same time, the consequences in the form of high interest rate levels are unwelcome. European states have undergone this consequences over the last few years, as an 'unsolicited boomerang effect', which was however predictable.

Many note a strict subjection to the rules of capitalism: reduction in public spending, privatizations, slimming down of social security schemes together with an increasing transfer of powers towards supranational bodies (Mercure, 2001). The WTO, IMF, World Bank and the OECD, to mention just a few examples, work along with states to produce normative models and fix limits for coordination of activities; they also bring in inspectors and consultants ensuring the fulfillment of these agreements and, finally, seek to legitimize them through an ideological viewpoint (Busino, 2001). Those organizations tend to reduce the state to the role of one strategist among many others. Traditionally paternalistic states are no longer able to keep their social commitments. Deliberate competition between national economies, with productivity differentials being insignificant, leaves for governments' reduction of social costs as the only way to gain an advantage. Very fast obsolescence of military technology

encourages inter-state cooperation or, at least, temporary alliances to tackle specific problems acting as a collective world police officer in a shaky world order (Castells, 1998).

Globalization has been accompanied by a proliferation of regional associations, which aim at reinforcing inter-state cooperation in particular geographic zones. The greater freedom of movement of capital has compelled states to adopt such strategies when facing outside challenges. This phenomenon can also be viewed as an outcome of ongoing state policies, which have lifted barriers to the movement of goods, services and people, by this means boosting up direct investments abroad. State policies have also played their part in the growth of multinational companies and have elaborated political programs that aim at disburdening trade and liberalize commercial exchanges from any restriction (Sénarclens, 2001).

2.1. REGIONAL UNION BUILDING

While the European Union is the oldest and most extensive example of regional association, the idea has spread in other regions of the world. One instance is the establishment of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the USA and Canada, which was subsequently extended to Mexico (North American FTA or NAFTA) in 1994 and in 2004 into Central America (CAFTA). CAFTA ties the United States with the Dominican Republic, and five Central American countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Signed by six Latin American countries in August 2004, in 2007 the Agreement has been fully implemented in only four. To date, the region has a FTA with the United States and likely will be the first to have one with the EU. CAFTA text is 85-percent identical to the NAFTA and is a springboard and model for the FTA of the Americas, which will include 34 nations along the entire western hemisphere. CAFTA was designed to open its members in exports, imports, outsourcing and off-shoring, attraction of foreign investment and the enforcement of legal system, which will improve the investment climate. However, Harvey (1994, p.158) reminds that “plans to improve the competitiveness of industry within a

regional alliance entail accelerating technological changes that remove living labour from production at home while exporting unemployment abroad". Since 1994, NAFTA's experience confirmed this possibility. While Central American members are among the world's smallest and poorest economies, CAFTA risks deepening the labour violations (McElhinny, 2004). MERCOSUR, created in 1991 by Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, mirrors CAFTA in that it does not feature supranational structures that might reduce the independence of its member states. MERCOSUR does however, set up a free trade area and, in 2006, a custom union.

ASEAN, formed in 1967 during the Vietnam War, actually became a real FTA, developing since 1992 regional poles for dialog. In 1998, despite a slowdown in the global trade volume growth largely owing to the Asian economic crisis and the Japanese recession, protectionist pressures were averted. Concerning trade policy, the drive toward market opening has continued worldwide, including in those countries most directly affected by the crisis (Howard, 1999). Moreover, a China-ASEAN FTA was agreed on in 2002 and will be implemented in stages – with safeguards for ASEAN's poorer members – up to 2015. Chinese leaders are doing a round of summit meetings, including ASEAN plus one (with China), ASEAN plus tree (China, Japan and South Korea) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC). The latter is the only trade forum embracing both sides of the Pacific. Other groupings are gaining heft. In particular, the ASEAN Regional Forum, with more than two dozen participants (including UE and US) has become a platform for discussing security issues in the Asia-Pacific region. The SCO has evolved to embrace issues such as drug smuggling, energy and economic cooperation in Central Asia (*The Economist*, 2007, March 31st, p.7-8). China would like to think that its model of development is one it can flaunt to the ASEAN and African countries as an alternative to the liberal-democratic free-market of the "Washington consensus" (*Economist.com* 2006, November 8th). Relatively stable relations

with neighbors act as protection against volatility in relations with the United States – particularly as that superpower is absent from many of the groupings.

A large body of literature examines the question of whether regional associations respond more readily to pressure from the economic and technocratic spheres or political interests. The European Union is interesting in the respect that it is supposed to produce truly supranational institutions. Since the European Coal and Steel Community, and especially after the Treaty of Rome, Europe, born out of American-supported reconstruction, has built itself on a basis of the progressive transfer of sovereignty (initially economic), in spite of the principle of the indivisibility of state power. Besides its economic and monetary aspects, since the Single European Act and the Treaty of Maastricht, the EU has sought to promote the idea of “European citizenship”, symbol of the unification of the European political corpus, while at the same time its citizens have practically no influence on the workings of the EU institutions. Sénarclens (2001) returns to this debate, contrasting the functionalist and realist approaches. The functionalist approach emphasizes the dynamic of the political system, where development follows the converging paths of the main actors in order to respond to the economic challenges these encounter: the key role of governmental elites, the civil service and, above all, business leaders. Economy is supposed to pull the politics in a context of technocratic impetus and pragmatism back-grounded by the decline of ideologies. On account of the encountered political obstacles, the neo-functionalists - without fundamentally questioning the economic growth - have since placed their emphasis more on the political dynamic generated by the economic dynamic, especially on governmental readiness to create supranational institutions. Conversely, the realist approach favors painstaking compromises between European leaders, with due reference to their relative strengths; compromises that are required by economic pressures from outside of the EU. European countries gradually lose their capacity for innovation and their competitive edge, faced with American, Japanese and

emerging economies' rivals. Hence, the decision is taken to enlarge the European market from within. The movement towards integration is therefore regarded as a strategy used by governments and administrations to achieve their goals by going over the head of parliaments and local government. This image of the EU is certainly an inter-governmental political reality "whose aim is the management of economic interdependence by means of the coordination of economic policies" (Sénarclens, 2001, p.65). Therefore, the legal and political restrictions born out of the EU institutions are a direct result of the political will of the leading EU states.

Sénarclens (2001) concludes that the EU remains a dynamic hybrid where member states must function with sovereignty in part devolved to the institutions, but in the knowledge that - unlike in a federal or cantonal system - retreat is still possible. Sometimes complaining about their limited room for maneuver, states nevertheless benefit from the dilution of power into intergovernmental networks of cooperation.

2.2. SUPRANATIONAL AUTHORITIES

Unlike the inter-state associations, large international organizations advanced well on the road to autonomy. There are many who believe that their officials work not for a country (e.g. the USA), but for some shared conception of the world: therefore technocrats would feel that they were working for their own cause. From every side, we note the growth in power of ever more numerous organizations and actors, whether in the intergovernmental or supranational spheres, or the global arena of public opinion. The present international system created in a post World War Two world consisted of about 30 independent states. It is outdated today, when independent states are nearly 200, not to mention the 300 organizations campaigning for the settling of various disputes across the world and a number of signed international treaties.

Intergovernmental organizations (like the OECD created in 1958 and its predecessors, UNICEF, HCR, UNDP and of course the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) can be counted actually in their thousands. The UN alone employs 50,000 officials, creating a population of experts to add to those of national civil services.

Even if the Cold War largely invalidated the usefulness of these organizations - their divisions never being adequately offset by their capacity for coordination or ability to set aside ideological rivalries - the positive contribution of many specialized organizations (UNICEF, FAO, ILO, etc.) must be recognized. These organizations provided shape of realistic content to an abstract body of 'global' values, such as the fight against hunger, the eradication of poverty, the defense of rights for women and children, for refugees', and an overall promotion of human rights.

Chavagneux (2000) notes that the World Bank and the IMF are developing a tendency for direct political involvement in the countries that they deal with; especially through the selective nature of loans and the evaluation of past policies: since its creation, the World Bank has granted alone more than \$250 billion in loans. This entry into politics arose from the notion of good governance, favoring a long term approach, which consists of creating a legal framework that promotes the private sector. Stiglitz (2002) demonstrates that the IMF mistakenly wishes to transplant solutions already tested in Latin America (budgetary and fiscal discipline, deregulation of currency and financial markets, incentives for private investors, privatization and the state reduced to little more than a ritual role) to Africa and Asia. Countries retaining control over movements of capital (Chile), forging their own path (Malaysia), or refusing the strictures of the international financial organizations (Argentina) seem to win out over the prevailing orthodoxy. Thus, Argentina demonstrates strong economic achievements that have not been supported, nor assisted by the IMF, and in many cases done by ignoring its recommendations and conditionalities.

Even if the phenomenon of intergovernmental and transnational organizations is large enough for the UN to have been described as “the solar system of the NGO galaxy” (Sénarclens, 2001, p.42), the concept of the NGO remains difficult to define. NGO label covers a wide spectrum of organizations of differing sizes and capabilities. Only in the field of development aid and located in the industrialized nations, 2200 NGO were listed that represent 8% of public donation. One of the oldest, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society was funded in 1823.

NGOs play a considerable role in the global public arena. They have greatly increased financial means and influence benefiting from the support of national or international public opinion: Save the Children Fund, Oxfam, Médecins sans Frontières, Amnesty International and Greenpeace all run large international fundraising operations. They have supported the concept of the right of intervention, for example, in the defense of human rights, and also the creation of genuinely democratic institutions, which can provide a basis for economic development. At the end of the first Gulf War, the UN Security Council Resolution 688 of April 5th 1991 insisted that Iraq end its repression of its Kurdish minorities and help NGOs establish themselves on Iraqi territory in order to bring aid to the Kurds. Does the right of intervention express the development of a universal human consciousness or does it owe more to American policy of bypassing international organizations, along with Russian and Chinese vetoes?

Sénarclens (2001) argues that NGOs do not secure all the elements that might guarantee democratic expression on a universal scale faced with resistance of state's realpolitik. NGOs are capable of mobilizing support for humanitarian causes (Handicap International for the fight against anti-personnel mines, for example), but sometimes they incorporate a wildly diverse and therefore divergent collections of interest groups and

ideologies. At the anti-globalization protests in Seattle, for example, ATTAC walked side by side with anarchists, religious groups and defenders of sea turtles.

It is true to say that human rights “rose” to academic respectability towards the end of the 1970's with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Amnesty International and the subsequent mushrooming of relevant courses in top law schools (Dezalay and Garth, 1998). However, there are several points to consider. The continuation of the activities of NGOs remain largely dependent on certain states, even if they contribute to change political focus and public debate through networks of experts or occasional spectacularly actions. NGOs are structuring networks linking themselves, such as the World Organization against Torture regrouping 150 NGOs in its Geneva base. On the other hand, wherever they work, NGOs need the support of states, intergovernmental organizations or associations like the EU. Articulation between NGO and supporting political body is not always clear. For example, in 1992, 8.2 billion dollars of aid to the developing world was channeled through American or American-influenced NGOs, i.e. more than all the aid distributed by the UN. NGOs therefore remain a Western-based phenomenon, often acting mostly in the sphere of influence of the United States (Greenpeace does little in China or Pakistan, for instance). Behind the varied political or frequently apolitical orientations of NGOs, can be often distinguished the political mark of neo-liberal individualism aiming at secularizing authority relations against local clan loyalties. Chinese recent expansion in Africa illustrates this point. China had gained so positive image in Africa that it had quickly come to rival America, France and international financial institutions for influence (Economist.com 2006, November 8th). For many African countries, fed up with the intrusiveness of Europeans and Americans fussing about corruption or torture and clamoring for accountability, China's straightforward approach is an attractive alternative to the pernickety of the IMF and the Paris Club of creditors, which have been quibbling over terms for years. China's credit is not only welcome in itself. It has reduced the

pressure from the West (*The Economist*, 2006, October 28th, p.54). Africa's position highlights the empirical limits for participation of the international financial organizations in the promotion of development of poorer nations.

Dezalay and Garth (1998) underline the extent to which organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch compete for the attention of medias, vindicating themselves as authentic "symbolic investment banks" on the market of civic virtue. They also demonstrate that several of NGO's founders belong to American elite of former anti-communist business lawyers and illustrate the politicization and professionalization of this new good cause militants coming from the best universities: corporate donations depends on notoriety and high media profile. By the way, NGOs provide the emergence of an international market in "skills of State". "To intervene in power-plays, instead of resorting to higher authority or the governing elite, this new generation of human rights practitioners now deploys their very own alumni network" (Dezalay et Garth, 1998, p.39) And also, we could add, mobilize public opinion using academic skills and social capital. "With allies [and informers] in government bodies, professional activists are well-placed to exploit administrative weaknesses or the contradictions of public policy" (Dezalay et Garth, 1998, p.40).

3. A GLOBAL HEGEMONY? THE END OF THE OLD ORDER?

In an age of nuclear power and terrorism, no country is totally self-reliant or capable, on its own, of safeguarding its security and independence. The classic theories of international relations have long hidden the problem of "interpreting interaction between players culturally distanced from each other [...] pretending instead all the actors to share a same rationale, that allows the 'cat and mouse' theory to interpret and explain serious international confrontations" (Badie and Smouts, 1992, p.26). Yet, "there can be no universal truths" (Johnson, 1997, quoted in Reuber, 2000, p.38). The question of hegemony is consubstantial to

that of globalization. It sometimes trips up on the idea of historical determinism, or, more frequently, the 'worldwide conspiracy' theory and its alliance of "globalizing" intellectuals, unrestrained capitalism and the military-industrial lobby. In this utopian post-national world of open borders and ultimately, non-sovereignty, Taguieff (2001) considers a basic consensus appearing amongst the elite in every field of expertise, creating something like a "crypto-sect" with its visionaries, prophets and preachers.

American globalism played a key role in XX century world trade integration. There is evidence that the neo-liberal ideal of free trade haul the world economy development, but applied mechanically to a wide range of countries, it also contribute to increase of poverty and inequality (Agnew, 2001), while the provided compensatory measures often appear ineffective (*The Economist*, 2007, January 20th, p.30-32). "Given the interdependencies and international divisions of labor that comprise the global economy, American prosperity [...] must be recognized as coming at the expense of peoples living in many other places" (Kodras, 2002, p.223). In this way, the USA is trying to entrench the market in the Middle East by their military presence. In the background, two further issues are at stake: energy security through control of the Gulf monarchies and reliable means of transport of energy resources and the constitution of a banking system and a non-stop financial system. But recently, "the Iraqi morass and the poisonous issue of Israel and Palestine, among other things" (*The Economist*, 2007, February, 10th, p.41) brought about the decline in American prestige. Conversely, two major players emerged in the region: Russia and China. In early 2007, *The Economist* (February 10th, p.41) stated that clever diplomacy has brought Russia back into the Middle East regional power game: recouping some of its cold-war losses, Russia strives for the role of a world's strong and confident power. Otherwise, unlike other outside powers involved, China is on good terms with everyone. Appreciating any diminution of American power,

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China increases its influence in the Middle East by joining the “Quartet” (America, the EU, the UN and Russia) that is pursuing peace efforts (*The Economist*, 2007, January 13th, p.46).

Leaving behind this raft of actors on the international and supranational scene, will one or more powers in fact exercise total control because of a process of a state’s monopolization of resources and means of advantage at international level?

To talk of hegemony implies the existence of a state, which has the political willpower and the economic and military means to maintain order on a global scale. The state that could choose between the British model of Splendid Isolation intervening only when necessary but very decisively, and the Bismarckian version of alliances with ‘natural’ i.e. culturally close allies excluding the chief rival. The risk of hegemony therefore, is to be the nodal point of an unstable network. United Kingdom played this role until 1914. In 1941 was achieved the

[...] completion of the half-accomplished fact of American hegemony, with ensuing benefit to the world and US. *America’s gift to the world* was to have four parts. It would guarantee free trade, and thereby promote prosperity. It would train the world’s technocrats, and thereby promote progress. It would distribute aid, and thereby alleviate want. It would promulgate the ideals of liberty and democracy, and thereby ennoble mankind. In return for these gifts, it would recover the sense of unique purpose and mission that is necessary to American national identity (Luce, 1941, *The American Century*, quoted in Agnew and Smith, 2002, p.7).

Hegemonic role was taken up by the USA after 1945.

At the international level, the government used investment, loans, negotiations, coercion, and outright intervention to induce the allegiance of other countries into a postwar world order that generally advanced the interests of US. In addition, the US government underwrote postwar expansion by facilitating the growth and profitability of major domestic corporations, especially in the penetration of overseas markets. Thus, in a strong assertion of its role in assisting capital accumulation, the state helped to position the US as the hegemonic power of the global political economy (Kodras, 2002, p.222).

In 1971, Hoffmann described this hegemony in terms of “tied up Gulliver”. Debate about the supposed “lost hegemony” of the United States, emerged before the end of the Cold War, spurred by defeat in Vietnam, the effectiveness of the USSR’s military counterweight, the loss of international prestige and the emergence of Japan and the European Community. Globalization amplifies this debate. Thus, erosion of American hegemony has nearly

contributed to the abandonment of the Breton Woods monetary system and encouraged the role of private banking in creation of international liquidity. For example, the financing of economy-boosting American military programs by the Japanese is only possible as long the creditors agree to prop up the American deficit. Then again “uniquely jealous of its own sovereignty [...]” during the twentieth century, “United States waged against rival messianic systems to ensure that the peoples of the world remained free to follow the American example in their political and economic arrangements” (Agnew and Smith, 2002, p.320). With no true rivals since the decline of the ex-USSR, only the United States can today allow themselves to act according to the demands of domestic public opinion. Thereupon, Smith argues that mobilization of American public opinion relies progressively on “the fear of enemies abroad – real of otherwise [...]” (2005, p.205). Thus in international level,

armed with their simple master narrative about the inexorable force of economic globalization, [Anglo-American] neoliberals famously hold that the global extension of free-market reforms will bring worldwide peace and prosperity. ... The economic axioms of structural adjustment, fiscal austerity, and free trade have now, it seems, been augmented by the direct use of military force (Roberts, Secor, and Sparke, 2003, p.887).

This so-called “democratic privilege” contrasts to the world-continent emerging in China, Russia and India and contradicts progressively the most of world public opinion.

The theory of the decline of American power has been extremely controversial. In 1988, Strange demonstrated that America’s strength was evident in four main spheres at a global level: national security, production of goods and services, finance, and scientific and technical expertise. The progress in these dimensions from 1980s until now allows us to highlight emerging tendencies.

First and foremost, national security was linked to the ability to intervene more or less anywhere, the successful counter-espionage and the nuclear deterrent. In military terms American hegemony still continues without any serious decline. “Today’s American war-making has been undertaken in a much more open, systematic, globally ambitious, and quasi-corporate economic style” (Roberts, Secor, and Sparke, 2003, p.888). Accordingly, a

Pentagon advisor and faculty member at the US Naval War College in Rhode Island, Thomas Barnett argues that

in the end, the military and financial markets are in the same business: the effective processing of risk. As such, it is essential that these two worlds – military and financial – come to better understand their interrelationships across the global economy (quoted in Roberts, Secor and Sparke, 2003, p.889).

This “interrelationship”, developed through construction of “strategic geographical imaginations” can be seen as consciously one-sided interpretations of local or region geographies (Reuber, 2000). For instance, the “safe” versus “dangerous” logic distinguishing geographic areas (Roberts, Secor and Sparke, 2003, p.892) leads identifying an enemy. Therefore, American biggest export is supposed to be security (Roberts, Secor, and Sparke, 2003, p.893). However, Iraq and Afghanistan are likely to demonstrate rather the persistence of violence... In contrast with post World War Two reconstruction, occurred in the context of rejection of war and the promotion of the democratic ideal, the post 9/11 geopolitical map demonstrates the return of legitimate war as tool for conflict resolution, perhaps as a “normal” policy instrument (Ravenel, 2003).

America’s failure in Iraq (*The Economist*, 2007, January 13th, p.9) draws attention to the limits of unilateral approach of the world “system administration” (Roberts, Secor and Sparke, 2003, p.894). On the one hand, the unilateral coercive action can often be prevented through the classic diplomacy mechanisms of asymmetrical negotiation and blackmail, reinforced through new “sounding boards” as it was in recent concern of North Korean and Iranian nuclear power. On the other hand, instead of secure “democratic” order, disorder and violence persists in Iraq, Afghanistan and many other places. Issue that can be broadly formulated as the Buddhist chant: “Hate can never be appeased by hate” (quoted in *The Economist*, 2007, March 22nd, p.90). Or, with less abstraction, freedom cannot be imposed by coercive force, doesn’t matter whether the coercion follows any laws. Concept of free society

in the modern West is rooted in the right and the agreement of people to change the laws. Therefore, appeal to facts and logic needs to be persuasive but not coercive (Knight, 1967).

Secondly, the production of goods and services, linked to multinational companies. The American economy may represent more than 20% of the world economy but 500 of 1,000 top multinational companies hail from this country. USA used to be the world's biggest exporter, but was outclassed now by Germany and China (*The Economist*, 2007, April 14th, p.12). In the framework of American geopolitical thinking, the control of "vital resources" and oil are necessary to assure it single superpower status, otherwise leading to unilateral military interventions.

Thirdly, finance: strength of the dollar once brought with it the ability to influence structurally foreign economies, encourage deregulation and reorient them even in the absence of complete structural control. Since then, for example, in the international bond market, the euro has displaced the dollar as the main currency (*The Economist*, 2007, April 14th, p.12). Note that American industrial-military complex depends heavily on Pentagon spending and the presence of placement funds (pension and mutual) that is demanding a "return on investment" (Moreau Defarges, 1998).

Fourthly, scientific and technical expertise, linked to research communities and communication networks is also challenged. For example, Indian and Chinese "brains" gradually choose to go home rather than to work abroad (that often mean in US).

Also, the spread of an Americanized way of viewing and understanding the world is taken up by diplomats and international public opinion in a vast political, administrative, intellectual and media machine. In terms of television programming, for example, the United States export more content than all other countries put together. Even so, to what extent does American cultural production broadcast a genuine or attractive picture of America rather than an empty "standard" image? Yet, traditional cultures of "connected" (Roberts, Secor and

Sparke, 2003, p.887) countries are exposed along with the level of “connection” to the universal offensive of allegedly “rational” and “natural” logic of profit. This “sideline” phenomenon coupled with unleashed “freedom” risks to entail the erosion of moral values and subsequent behavior. Russia of 1990 illustrates the effects of an untrammelled openness to the world economy.

The new global geopolitical situation remains uncertain. The economic power is shifting away from the “developed” economies (North America, Western Europe, Japan and Australasia) towards the emerging ones, especially in Asia. Although Africa still lags behind, the growth is broadly spread: Brazil, Russia, India and China account for only two-fifths of emerging-world output (*The Economist*, 2006, September 16th, p.13). The post Cold War period was above all marked by increasingly powerful internal influences in United States foreign policy, as well as the importance of bilateral contacts with other states in competition with supranational bodies (Melandrin and Vaisse, 2001). Among these domestic influences, the power of the lobby and Congress’ attempts to break the Executive’s monopoly on Foreign Affairs policy-making stands out. The United States, therefore, acts multilaterally where possible, but unilaterally if necessary. Melandrin and Vaisse (2001) demonstrate that American freedom of action requires selective alliances in order to impose economic sanctions and carry out retaliatory actions. Yet, “the ever-increasing circles of global capitalist prosperity [...] cannot be effectively squared with this uneven and asymmetrical image of a divided world ruled by an aggressively assertive American systems administrator” (Roberts, Secor and Sparke, 2003, p.894). Moreover, for Roberts, Secor and Sparke “it seems, that double standard - one rule set for us and one rule set for you – is central to the wider neoliberal vision” (2003, p.894). Can we start to talk of a drift from a “downgraded multilateralism” towards a centralized order conflicting with the idea of a world of

“networks” and “regions”? The US remains the only global superpower but its position is weakened by a new and disparate terrorist threat that pushes it towards preemptive war.

[...] The failing globalism of the US state is increasingly apparent. The resort to unnecessary military might in the first place, as opposed to the common diplomatic currency of negotiation and blackmail, represents a major defeat that empire builders Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt would readily have avoided. (Smith, 2005, p.205)

Whereas formerly we fought exclusively with our neighbors and enemies well within our reach because hereditary enemies were often at the gates, today’s terrorist threat plays on its image of omnipresence and milks its media impact to the maximum in an interconnected world. On the global scale, the “forced landing” of the American eagle means that all wars tend to develop into civil wars. The movement of criminal networks affecting national securities and terrorism’s systematic use of mobility, civil unrest and mobilization of third party public opinion to its own ends, all go towards creating a situation that can no longer be explained along or confined to classic national lines. “Spaces of political regulation are starting to emerge that match the global-local geographical form increasingly taken by economic accumulation as growing consciousness of globalization stimulates political action at scales other than the national” (Agnew, 2001, p.149). The global public arena is progressively opening to apologists of every shade of opinion for every kind of action who can use the Internet as a new sounding board.

CONCLUSION

The world is not progressively losing its meaning after the end of the Cold War, but is situated in an indeterminate state between disorder and unilateral order of USA, increasingly losing vital allies (Africa, Asia, and Middle East) and facing emerging rivals (China, Russia). The strength of emerging economies makes the world less dependent on America (*The Economist*, 2006, September 16th, p.13). Is it possible that the United States could dominate “mechanically”, through its still central position in the World Economy? And, accordingly,

should we fear more American isolationism or American unilateralism (Martin, Metzger and Pierre, 2003)?

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