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CLASHING VIEWS

"WHAT KIND of world order do we want?" asked Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister, on the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003. That this question remains on the minds of many Europeans today is a telling sign of the differences that separate the two sides of the Atlantic--because most Americans have not pondered the question of world order since the war.

They will have to. The great transatlantic debate over Iraq was rooted in deep disagreement over world order. Yes, Americans and Europeans debated whether Saddam Hussein posed a serious threat and whether war was the right way to deal with it. A solid majority of Americans answered yes to both questions, while even larger majorities of Europeans answered no. Yet these disagreements reflected more than just differing tactical and analytical assessments of the situation in Iraq. As Dominique de Villepin, France's foreign minister, put it, the struggle was less about Iraq than it was between "two visions of the world." The differences over Iraq were not only about policy. They were also about first principles.

Opinion polls taken before, during, and after the war show two peoples living on separate strategic and ideological planets. Whereas more than 80 percent of Americans believe that war can sometimes achieve justice, less than half of Europeans agree. Americans and Europeans disagree about the role of international law and international institutions and about the nebulous but critical question of what confers legitimacy on international action. These diverging world views predate the Iraq war and the presidency of George W. Bush, although both may have deepened and hardened the transatlantic rift into an enduring feature of the international landscape. "America is different from Europe," German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder declared matter-of-factly before the war. Who can deny it any longer?

At the beginning of 2003, before the Iraq war, the transatlantic gulf was plainly visible. What was less clear then was how significant it would turn out to be for the world as a whole. At the time, one could have imagined that Europe and the United States would part ways on global strategic matters and create a workable, if not quite amicable, division, of labor, in which Europe would concentrate on Europe and the United States on everything else. A certain mutual indifference might replace the two sides' Cold War partnership, but it need not augur an impending crisis within the West. Could not Americans and Europeans simply have said to one another, "You go your way, and I'll go mine?"

Today, a darker reality looms. A great philosophical schism has opened within the West, and mutual antagonism threatens to debilitate both sides of the transatlantic community. At a time when new dangers and crises are proliferating rapidly, this schism could have serious consequences. For Europe and the United States to come apart strategically is bad enough. But what if their differences over world order infect the rest of what we have known as the liberal West? Will the West still be the West?

A few years ago, such questions were unthinkable. After the Cold War, the political theorist Francis Fukuyama assumed along with the rest of us that at the end of history the world's liberal democracies would live in relative harmony. Because they share liberal principles, these democracies would "have no grounds on which to contest each other's legitimacy." Conflicts might divide the West from the rest, but not the West itself. That reasonable assumption has now been thrown into doubt, for it is precisely the question of legitimacy that divides Americans and Europeans today--not the legitimacy of each other's political institutions, perhaps, but the legitimacy of their respective visions of world order. More to the point, for the first time since World War II, a majority of Europeans has come to doubt the legitimacy of U.S. power and of U.S. global leadership.

The United States cannot ignore this problem. The struggle to define and obtain international legitimacy

in this new era may prove to be among the most critical contests of our time. In some ways, it is as significant in determining the future of the U.S. role in the international system as any purely material measure of power and influence.

THREE PILLARS

WHERE EXACTLY does this struggle over legitimacy come from? Throughout the Cold War, the legitimacy of U.S. power and of U.S. global leadership was largely taken for granted, and not just by Americans, The vast majority of Europeans, although they sometimes chafed under U.S. dominance and often questioned U.S. actions in Vietnam, Latin America, and elsewhere, nevertheless accepted U.S. leadership as both necessary and desirable.

Contrary to much mythologizing on both sides of the Atlantic these days, the foundations of U.S. legitimacy during the Cold War had little to do with the fact that the United States helped create the UN or faithfully abided by the precepts of international law laid out in the organization's charter. For the first four decades of its existence, the UN Security Council was paralyzed by the stalemate between the two Cold War superpowers. The United States did not consider it necessary to seek the approval of the Security Council to make or threaten war, and Europeans did not expect or demand that it should. Nor did European nations seek such authorization for their own wars in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, or the southern Atlantic. When the United States did cite international law to justify its Cold War policies, it appealed to the catchall principle of collective self-defense. It argued that its actions--whether military interventions or clandestine overthrows of regimes in the Third World--were undertaken for the collective defense of the free world against an inherently aggressive international communism. It was not international law and institutions but the circumstances of the Cold War, and Washington's special role in it, that conferred legitimacy on the United States, at least within the West.

In Europe, U.S. legitimacy rested on three pillars, all based on the existence of the Soviet communist empire. The sturdiest pillar was Europe's perception that the Soviet Union posed a strategic threat to the West--a reality made manifest by hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops parked in the center of Europe-- and its understanding that only Washington possessed the power to deter Moscow. For most Europeans, and for most U.S. allies in Asia too, the United States' widely accepted role as principal defender against the Soviet threat gave it a very broad mantle of legitimacy. Even when they believed that the United States was acting foolishly or immorally, as in Vietnam, most Europeans nevertheless continued to accept U.S. power and leadership. The legitimacy the United States enjoyed within the West during the Cold War derived in large part from its allies' self-interest.

Europeans also perceived the Soviet Union as a common ideological threat. The United States prided itself on being the "leader of the free world," and most Europeans agreed. The Cold War's Manichaean struggle provided the world's most powerful democracy with substantial authority in the democratic camp. In retrospect, it is clear that commonly shared liberal democratic principles meant a good deal more in a world threatened by totalitarianism than they have in a world made safer for democracy.

Finally, Cold War bipolarity conferred what might be called "structural legitimacy" on the United States. The two superpowers' roughly equal strength meant that U.S. might, although vast, was kept in check. This is not to say that Europeans welcomed Soviet military power on the continent, but many implicitly understood that the existence of Soviet conventional and nuclear power acted as a restraint on Washington. Charles de Gaulle's France, Willy Brandt's Germany, and other states relished the small measure of independence from U.S. dominance that the superpower balance gave them.

When the Cold War ended, the pillars of U.S. legitimacy collapsed along with the Berlin Wall and Lenin's statues. There has been little to replace them with since. Radical, militant Islamism, however potent when manifested as terrorism, has not replaced communism as an ideological threat to Western liberal democracy. Nor have the more diffuse and opaque threats of the post-Cold War era replaced the massive Soviet threat as a source of legitimacy for U.S. power. In the 1990s, ethnic conflict in the Balkans compelled Europeans to give their blessing to U.S. military intervention. Making Europe "whole and free" was a transatlantic project in which Washington was still accorded a leading role, especially by the nations of central and eastern Europe. But its successful completion put an end to European strategic dependence on the United States, at least in the view of many western Europeans. Today, the phrase "leader of the free world" sounds vaguely absurd--even to American ears.

Most Europeans never full shared Washington's concerns about weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq, Iran, and North Korea--not during the Clinton administration, and not since. Nor do they share its post-September 11 alarm over the possible nexus between WMD and international terrorism. Rightly or

wrongly, Europeans do not believe that those weapons will be aimed at them. To the extent that they do worry, moreover, most Europeans do not look to the United States to protect them anymore. They live in their geopolitical paradise, without fear of the jungles beyond. They no longer welcome those who guard the gates. Instead, they ask, Who will guard the guards?

THE UNIPOLAR PREDICAMENT

WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED "the unipolar predicament," therefore, is not the product of any specific U.S. policy or of a particular U.S. administration. With the end of the Cold War, unprecedented U.S. global power itself has become the critical issue, one with which Europeans and Americans have only begun to grapple. "What do we do," Fischer asked after the Iraq war began, "when ... or most important partner is making decisions that we consider extremely dangerous?" What indeed? The question is relatively new, because Europe's loss of control over U.S. actions is relatively new too. During the Cold War, even a dominant United States was compelled to listen to Europe, if only because U.S. policy at the time sought above all else to protect and strengthen Europe. Today, Europe has lost much of that influence. It is too weak to be an essential ally but too secure to be a potential victim. During the Cold War, the United States would calculate how its actions would affect Europe's security. Today it need not worry as much.

That is why Europeans are now concerned about unconstrained U.S. power and about regaining some control over how it is exercised. Long accustomed to helping shape the world, Europeans do not want to sit back now and let the United States do all the driving, especially when they believe that it is driving dangerously.

Europeans felt this loss of control acutely during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, as they waited helplessly for a hesitant Clinton administration to intervene. When the United States did act in the 1999 Kosovo war, Europeans had to watch that difficult conflict, in their own backyard, be directed almost entirely by a U.S. general. Whether the U.S. president is George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, or George W. Bush, the new international structure has put Europeans in the unenviable position of having to trust the sole superpower to judge and act wisely.

Aside from signaling Europe's demotion, the unipolar predicament also raises fundamental issues about world order today. Above all, it tests the United States' political and moral legitimacy. The modern liberal mind is offended by the notion that a single world power may be unfettered except by its own sense of restraint. No matter how diplomatically adept a U.S. president might be, the spirit of liberal democracy recoils at the idea of hegemonic dominance, even when it is exercised benignly. Well before the Bush administration proved so maladroit at reassuring even Washington's closest allies, other post-Cold War administrations faced mounting anxiety about growing U.S. dominance. In the 1990s, as Clinton and Madeleine Albright were proudly dubbing the United States the "indispensable nation," the foreign ministers of China, France, and Russia were declaring the U.S.-led unipolar world dangerous and unjust. Samuel Huntington warned about the "arrogance" and "unilateralism" of U.S. policies when Bush was still governor of Texas.

Europe's worst fears became real with September 11, 2001. After the attacks, the Bush administration and Americans in general became unabashed about wielding U.S. power primarily in defense of their own, newly endangered vital interests. Europe's initial support for the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and NATO's historic invocation of the right collectively to defend the United States were aimed in part at ensuring that Europe would have some say over the U.S. response to the terrorist attacks. It is no wonder, then, that Washington's apparent indifference to these offers of assistance was so troubling to Europeans.

When the United States began to look beyond Afghanistan, toward Iraq and the "axis of evil," Europeans realized they had lost control. It became clear that the bargain underlying transatlantic cooperation during the Cold War had become inverted. Whereas once the United States risked its own safety to defend the vital interests of a threatened Europe, a threatened United States was now looking out for itself in apparent, and sometimes genuine, disregard for what many Europeans perceived to be their moral, political, and security interests.

U.S. hegemony has been an especially vexing problem for Europeans because there is so little they can do about it. Hopes that a multipolar regime might emerge have faded since the 1990s. Almost everyone concedes today that U.S. power will be nearly impossible to match for decades. And the states most likely to become its competitors, China and Russia, do not present an attractive alternative for most Europeans. Meanwhile, Europe's own military capabilities continue to decline relative to those of the United States. France's ambitions to create a European counterweight to the United States are constantly overwhelmed by the more powerful postmodern European aversion to military power, power politics, and the very idea of

the balance of power. Such aspirations have been checked, too, by fears of alienating the powerful United States, by widespread suspicion in Europe of France's "soft" hegemonism, and by lingering fears of renewed German power.

In the end, however, Europeans have not sought to counter U.S. hegemony in the usual, power-oriented fashion, because they do not find U.S. hegemony threatening in the traditional power-oriented way. Not all global hegemons are equally frightening. U.S. power, as Europeans well know, does not imperil Europe's security or even its autonomy. Europeans do not fear that the United States will seek to control them; they fear that they have lost control over the United States and, by extension, over the direction of world affairs.

If the United States is suffering a crisis of legitimacy, then, it is in large part because Europe wants to regain some measure of control over Washington's behavior. The vast majority of Europeans objected to the U.S. invasion of Iraq not simply because they opposed the war. They objected also because U.S. willingness to go to war without the Security Council's approval--that is, without Europe's approval--challenged both Europe's world view and its ability to exercise even a modicum of influence in the new unipolar system. Europeans, as French President Jacques Chirac explained, want international crises to be addressed by the international community, not "by one nation acting alone on the basis of its own interests and judgments." Such calls for the involvement of the international community betray an unmistakable insistence that Europe, in particular, be given a place at the helm.

This is not to argue that the Europeans' demand that the United States seek international legitimization is simply self-serving. Because of their own history, and because they now operate within an international organization, the European Union, that requires multilateral agreement on all matters, Europeans' respect for the legitimacy derived from multilateral negotiation and international legal institutions is often sincere. But ideals and self-interest frequently coincide, and Europe's assaults on the legitimacy of U.S. dominance may also become an effective way of constraining and controlling the superpower. Legitimacy, the senior British diplomat Robert Cooper has written, "is as much a source of power as force." Undoubtedly, there are many in Europe who hope this is true.

Europeans believe that legitimacy is an asset they have in abundance. In the new geopolitical jostling with the United States, they see it as their comparative advantage--the great equalizer in an otherwise lopsided relationship. The EU, most of its members believe, enjoys a natural legitimacy, simply by virtue of being a collective body. The United States needs Europe, argues Javier Solana, the secretary-general of the EU Council, because Europe is "a partner with the legitimacy that comes through the collective action of a union of twenty-five sovereign states." In a modern liberal world, this legitimacy can be wielded as a substitute for other types of power and bartered for influence. In return for a greater say in world affairs and over the exercise of U.S. power, the argument goes, Europe can give the United States the legitimacy it now lacks.

Americans cannot afford to dismiss the proposal out of hand, as much as some might wish to do so. Invading Iraq and trying to reconstruct it without the broad benediction of Europe has not been a particularly happy experience, even if the United States eventually succeeds. It is clear that Americans cannot ignore the question of legitimacy, and it is clear that they cannot provide legitimacy for themselves. Where, then, should they look to find it?

LEGITIMACY MYTHS

SINCE the United States first began openly contemplating the invasion of Iraq, Europe's answer has been to look to the Security Council. "The United Nations is the place where international rules and legitimacy are founded," de Villepin declared before the Security Council in March 2003, "because it speaks in the name of peoples." Americans may or may not like it, but, in saying this, de Villepin spoke in the name of a vast majority of Europeans, including Britons, Italians, Poles, and Spaniards, and many others in the misnamed "new Europe." Europe's belief in the UN's authority is so powerful that even Washington's staunchest ally, Prime Minister Tony Blair, believed UN authorization for the invasion of Iraq was absolutely essential to satisfy the British public.

As polls consistently show, Americans have a certain reverence for the Security Council too. Admittedly, their support is significantly more measured and a good deal more conditional, and a solid majority of them favored bypassing the Security Council to invade Iraq. But Americans support the UN enough that President Bush decided it was wise, at least for the sake of appearances, first to seek the Security Council's approval for invading Iraq and then to return to the body repeatedly to generate international support--and international legitimacy--for U.S. reconstruction activities.

But is the Security Council really the ultimate depositary of international legitimacy, as Europeans insist

today? International life would be simpler if it were. But it is not. Ever since the UN's creation almost six decades ago, the Security Council has failed to function as the UN's more idealistic founders intended. And it has never been accepted as the sole source of international legitimacy, not even by Europeans. Europe's recent demand that the United States seek UN authorization for the Iraq war, and presumably for all future wars, was a novel--even revolutionary--proposition.

During the four decades of the Cold War, the Security Council was paralyzed by implacable hostility between its two strongest vetowielding members. Only after the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War was it even possible to imagine that the Security Council might function as the sole source of international authority and legitimacy. Still, it has not. The Security Council did function on occasion, but most observers agree that its authority weakened rather than strengthened over the first decade after the Cold War. In 1994, for example, the Clinton administration sent troops to Haiti without the Security Council's authorization, which came only after the fact. In 1998, it bombed Iraq in Operation Desert Fox over the strong objections France and Russia expressed before the Security Council.

By no means are Americans the only culprits in acting without UN approval: Europeans also bypass the Security Council when it suits their purposes. In Kosovo, for example, it was the Europeans who (along with the United States) went to war without obtaining the Security Council's legitimizing sanction. And that did not prevent them from arguing at the time, and since, that the Kosovo war was legitimate. They believed that they had a particular moral responsibility to prevent another genocide on the continent and a special license to go to war to stop it. According to Fisher, one of war's strongest proponents in 1999, in this case history and morality trumped traditional principles of state sovereignty and nonintervention.

The Clinton administration was also perfectly content to go to war in 1999 without UN authorization. Indeed, many of its senior officials hoped that Kosovo would set a useful precedent for future interventions. "'Multilateral if possible, unilateral if necessary' was the catechism of the Clinton administration," the British political scientist Christopher Coker noted. Europeans justified intervention on slightly different grounds. As de Villepin rightly recalled, the United States and the United Kingdom saw Kosovo "as the first instance of a customary right to intervene on humanitarian grounds without a UN mandate. We, however, saw it as an exception, justified by wide support and the threat of an imminent humanitarian disaster."

But exceptions can be deadly, especially when they are used to sidestep norms as fragile and often-violated as international laws on the use of force. The fact remains that the Kosovo war was illegal, and not only because it lacked Security Council authorization: Serbia had not committed any aggression against another state but was slaughtering its own ethnic Albanian population. The intervention therefore violated the sovereign equality of all nations, a cardinal principle--perhaps the cardinal principle--of the UN Charter and the bedrock principle of international law for centuries. During the Kosovo conflict, Henry Kissinger warned that "the abrupt abandonment of the concept of national sovereignty" risked unmooring the world from any notion of order, legal or otherwise. Many Europeans rejected this complaint at the time. Back then--just four years before the Iraq war--they did not seem to believe that international legitimacy resided exclusively with the Security Council, or in the UN Charter, or even in traditional principles of international law. Instead they believed in the legitimacy of their common postmodern moral values.

It may be worth noting that in reaching that conclusion in 1999, Europe did not speak "in the name of peoples." Most of the nations of Latin America, Africa, and the Arab world vigorously objected to the abrogation of the UN Charter in Kosovo, no doubt because they feared that Western liberal principles of moral responsibility could someday be employed to justify intervention against them. As the law professor Michael Glennon has noted, the nations of the North and the West sharply disagreed with the nations of the South and the East over the fundamental issue of how to determine when armed intervention is appropriate.

When the United States and some of its allies went to war against Saddam Hussein in March 2003, not much had changed. The principle that the Security Council alone could authorize the use of force had not been established, not even by the Europeans themselves. Secretary of State Colin Powell could well argue, as he did in October 2003, that the United States and its supporters possessed the "authority to intervene in Iraq ... just as we did in Kosovo." Yet, by then, France, Germany, and other European nations were demanding that the United States adhere to an international legal standard they themselves had ignored, for sound moral and humanitarian reasons, a mere four years earlier.

Legal scholars, in the meantime, might have been working toward establishing new principles to justify humanitarian intervention. But European leaders, realizing that such principles could be stretched to fit many circumstances, had already decided they wanted all loopholes closed. When the Iraq crisis loomed in late 2002, many simply shifted their view of international law and legitimacy. They scuttled away from the

moralistic principles they had used to justify war in Kosovo and began demanding a much more rigid adherence to the UN Charter. Faced with the prospect of a U.S. invasion in Iraq, Fischer did a surprising volte-face: he categorically rejected the idea that armed intervention and the violation of a nation's sovereignty could ever be justified, even "in cases of gross human rights violations." If intervention in another state's affairs were to become the new principle, "there [would be] numerous candidates" for it, Fischer warned, echoing the very arguments Kissinger made in 1999. "When will [this principle] be applied? By whom will it be legitimized?" Good questions. But they were good questions in 1999, too.

Europeans will protest that Kosovo and Iraq were different, and in many ways they were. But they did not differ in their essential character as examples of the controversial use of force by some states against others. Any "rules-based" international order must encompass both conflicts under a common framework. The failure to do so returns us to a world where some nations decide for themselves, guided by their own morality and sense of justice and order, when war is justified or not. That, however, is the only world we have ever lived in. It is a world in which those with power, believing they have right on their side, impose their sense of justice on others.

This reality of international existence is often described as "might makes right." But not all claims to justice are equally valid. Because liberalism is animated by a certain conviction about justice and morality-- a devotion to the protection of individual right--modern liberals, in Europe or in the United States, cannot accept a moral relativism of this kind. Nor should they. During World War II, the allied democracies' claim to moral superiority and justice was stronger than that of Hitler's Germany and imperial Japan. During the Cold War, the liberal West's position was more compelling than that of the Soviet bloc. And during the Kosovo war, NATO's claim was stronger than that of Slobodan Milosevic and of Boris Yeltsin's Russia. In other words, a world without a universal standard of international law need not be without morality and justice. On the other hand, overly rigid respect for principles of international law can impede the pursuit of morality and justice, as Europe recognized in the case of Kosovo.

These days, most Europeans and some Americans argue that, by invading Iraq without the Security Council's approval, the United States has torn the fabric of the international order. In doing so they overlook that the fabric of this hoped-for international order has yet to be knit. And they forget that if such an international order did exist, Europe would already have undermined it in 1999.

The point here is not to catch Europeans contradicting themselves. If their definition of legitimacy has proved conveniently flexible in recent years, it is because legitimacy is a genuinely elusive and malleable concept. Discovering where legitimacy lies at any given moment in history is an art, not a science reducible to the reading of international legal documents. That is a serious challenge for the modern liberalism that animates the United States and Europe alike. Recent crises such as those in Kosovo and Iraq have shown that the search for legitimacy creates a fundamental dilemma for liberalism and liberal internationalism.

The problem is that the modern liberal vision of progress in international affairs has always been bifocal. On the one hand, liberalism has entertained since the Enlightenment a version of world peace based on an ever-strengthening international legal system. The success of such a system rests on the recognition that all nations, big or small, democratic or tyrannical, humane or barbarous are equal sovereign entities. As Hugo Grotius, Hans Morgenthau, and many others have asked over the centuries, how would international law survive if states could violate one another's sovereignty in the name of propagating democracy, human rights, or any other moral good?

On the other hand, modern liberalism cherishes the rights and liberties of the individual and defines progress as the greater protection of these rights and liberties across the globe. In the absence of a sudden global democratic and liberal transformation, that goal can be achieved only by compelling tyrannical or barbarous regimes to behave more humanely, sometimes through force. Looking back on Kosovo, the genocide in Rwanda, and other crises, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan aptly framed the modern liberal's quandary. "On the one hand," he asked, "is it legitimate for a regional organization to use force without a UN mandate? On the other, is it permissible to let gross and systematic violations of human rights, with grave humanitarian consequences, continue unchecked?"

Given the tension between these two aspirations, what constitutes international legitimacy will inevitably be a matter of dispute within the liberal world. Immanuel Kant's vision of "perpetual peace" solved the problem in theory, by presuming that all the nations of his imagined international system would be free, liberal republics. But the UN Charter enshrined the "sovereign equality of all its members," even though, in practice, the nature of their governments varies wildly. The present international legal structure, in other words, does not--and arguably cannot--conform to liberalism's goal of ameliorating the human condition by securing individual rights for all.

This is a problem for all modern liberals. But it is a particularly difficult one for Europeans. Having moved beyond the Westphalian order into a postmodern, supranational order, Europe is the Kantian miracle. Ironically, however, although many Europeans now claim to define international legitimacy as strict obedience to the UN Charter and the Security Council, the union they have created transcends the UN's exclusive focus on national sovereignty. As a confederation of free states that subject themselves to interference with their sovereignty, the EU better fulfills the vision of Kant than that of Grotius. The postmodern European order rests on an entirely different political and moral foundation than the one on which the UN was erected.

At the time of the Kosovo war, Blair argued that Europe must fight "for a new internationalism where the brutal repression of ethnic groups will not be tolerated [and] for a world where those responsible for crimes will have nowhere to hide." If this is the "new internationalism," then the "old internationalism" of the UN Charter is dead. Europeans may have to choose which version of liberal internationalism they really intend to pursue. Whether they do so or not, however, they must at least recognize that the two paths diverge.

For Americans, the choice is likely to be less difficult: the United States is, and always has been, less divided on this question than Europeans are today. By nature, tradition, and ideology, the United States has generally favored the promotion of liberal principles over the niceties of Westphalian diplomacy. Despite its role in helping to create the UN and draft the UN Charter, the United States has never fully accepted the organization's legitimacy or the charter's doctrine of sovereign equality. Although fiercely protective of its own autonomy, the United States has been less concerned about the inviolability of the sovereignty of others. It has reserved for itself the right to intervene anywhere and everywhere. And although it is as capable of self-serving hypocrisy as other nations, the United States has generally justified its interventions in the name of defending the cause of liberalism.

In this sense, the United States is and always has been a revolutionary power, a sometimes unwitting-- but nevertheless persistent--disturber of the status quo, wherever its influence grows. From its founding generation onward, the United States has looked at foreign tyrannies as transient and destined to be toppled by the forces of republicanism that its own revolution unleashed. Americans consider hostile tyrannies as fair targets and even allied dictatorships as inherently illegitimate. If most Americans have been oblivious to their own nation's revolutionary impact on the world, the rest of the world has not. In the early nineteenth century, European conservatives such as Klemens von Metternich feared that the American Revolution and the French upheaval it helped spark would ripple outward and fatally engulf their societies. Today, it is the conservative forces of extremism in the Muslim world--the militant fundamentalists--who fear U.S. influence and seek to repel it. And for Europeans, who are consumed with radical changes on their own continent and seek a predictable future in the world beyond, the United States has once again become a dangerous member of the society of nations.

FAREWELL, WESTPHALIA
IN EUROPE'S VIEW, this danger is best encapsulated in the so-called Bush doctrine and in its commitment to confronting the global "axis of evil." Many Europeans and some Americans profess to be shocked that the United States would announce its intention to seek "regime change" in despotic governments, even at the expense of international law and the UN Charter. In light of U.S. history, especially of the previous half-century, however, nothing could be less shocking. The Bush doctrine, such as it is, has naturally sprung out of the United States' liberal revolutionary tradition. If the vision of securing the rights of all peoples risks running afoul of international legal traditions, it should come as no surprise that a liberal nation such as the United States would be even more inclined to set aside those constraints to defend its own soil and citizens against dictators with deadly arsenals.

The problem of legitimacy is a good deal more complex today because the emergence of a unipolar era coincided with two other historical developments: the proliferation of WMD and the rise of international terrorism, both of which seem more threatening to Americans than to Europeans. It is e Bush administration's response to these developments, including the doctrine of "preemption" ("Prevention" would be a more accurate term), that has caused the greatest uproar. It has promoted many Europeans, and many others around the world, to call the United States' willingness to take preventive action a prime example of the superpower's disregard for international law and the international order--stark evidence of its new illegitimacy.

But a more compelling way to assess the Bush doctrine is to ask whether new international circumstances might not be forcing Americans, as well as Europeans and even the UN secretary-general, to

reexamine traditional international legal principles and definitions of legitimacy. Even before the Bush administration publicly enunciated its policy of preventive war in 2002, a growing body of opinion in both the United States and Europe was arguing that preventive action might at times be necessary to meet new international threats, even if it violated state sovereignty, prohibitions against intervention, and other traditional legal norms. Thinkers as diverse as Michael Walzer and Henry Kissinger concluded that principles left over from Westphalia were inadequate to deal with today's challenges. Even Kofi Annan has suggested that UN members consider developing "criteria for an early authorization of coercive measures to address certain types of threats--for instance, terrorist groups armed with weapons of mass destruction."

Given this growing, if unrecognized, convergence of opinion, the real issue may not be whether prevention is ever justified but rather who may do the preventing and who decides when, where, and how it is handled. In this matter as in many others, Europe objects less to U.S. actions than to what it perceives to be their unilateral character. The dispute over preventive war is, in other words, little more than a restatement of America's unipolar predicament: how can the world's sole superpower be controlled?

WHAT MULTILATERALISM?

MOST EUROPEANS would argue that if the United States seeks to gain international legitimacy for any use of force, it must avoid acting alone and it must embrace a foreign policy of multilateralism. Most Americans would gladly agree--so long as they did not look too closely at what Europeans mean by the term. When Americans speak of "multilateralism," they mean a policy that actively solicits and tries to gain the support of allies. But even for those among them who claim to be multilateralists, a Security Council authorization is never essential. It is a means to the end of gaining allied support, but not an end in itself.

For Europeans, however, "multilateralism" has a more formal and legalistic cast. It is a means of gaining legitimate sanction from duly constituted international bodies before undertaking any action; it is an essential prerequisite for action. A recent poll showed that, whereas a majority of Americans would bypass the Security Council if U.S. vital interests were threatened, a majority of Europeans would follow a Security Council decision, even at the cost of their nation's vital interests. At least so Europeans claim today, after the Iraq war. In 1999, when the issue was Kosovo, they felt differently.

And why, exactly, did so many Europeans believe the United States acted unilaterally in Iraq last year? After all, the United States invaded Iraq not alone, but with a number of international partners, including such prominent members of the EU as the United Kingdom, Poland, and Spain. In some sense, then, its action was "multilateral," even without a UN authorization, just as the Kosovo war was multilateral even though the Security Council had not approved it.

When the United States invaded Iraq, the Europeans set a new, high, but shaky standard for international legitimacy. "The authority of our action," de Villepin declared in his famous speech to the Security Council in February 2003, had to be based "on the unity of the international community." But what does that mean? Can no action be legitimate without the unanimous consent of the entire international community? Or is "unity" something less than unanimity and a notion with a shifting definition?

The United States enjoyed the support of dozens of nations for its war in Iraq, but that, according to de Villepin and many other Europeans, was not enough. What magic number, if any, would have conferred legitimacy? Would the support of certain critical allies have satisfied the test? It is difficult to imagine that Europeans would have called the U.S. action in Iraq unilateral if France, Germany, and the United Kingdom had supported it but not China or Russia. (After all, ey did not think their own war in Kosovo was unilateral simply because Russia and much of the developing world opposed it.) Is that so say that France's support is worth more than Spain's? "Legitimacy depends on creating a wide international consensus," Solana insists. But how wide is wide? And who decides what is wide enough? The answers to such questions are inevitably subjective--far too subjective to serve as the basis for any rules-based international order.

It is difficult not to conclude, therefore, that when Europeans and American critics call the war in Iraq unilateral, they do not really mean that the United States lacked broad international support. They mean instead that the United States lacked broad support in Europe. Their grievance is not that Russia and China or the vast majority of nations in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East opposed the war. For much of the past century, much of the world's population has opposed many U.S> policies, and many European policies, too, without prompting a crisis of legitimacy in the West. No, what critics call U.S. "unilateralism" in the Iraq war is Washington's determination to act without the full support of all its traditional European allies, including, most spectacularly, France and Germany. The Bush administration was "unilateralist" not because it lost the support of Beijing, Brasília, Kuala Lumpur, Moscow, and dozens of other capitals but

because it lost the support of Paris and Berlin.

In the end, what Washington's critics really resented was that it would not and could not be constrained, evne by its closest friends. From the perspective of Berlin and Paris, the United States was unilateralist because no European power had any real influence over it. Fischer stated the issue with candor: "What will become of the Europeans given the dominant role of the United States? Will they be able to determine their own fate or will they merely be forced to carry out what has been decided elsewhere?" Yes, the British and the Spaniards supported the United States in Iraq. But for Fischer, "the decisive question" was whether these countries "can have or ever did have any influence at all." From this perspective, even with a hundred nations and three-quarters of Europe on its side, the United States might still have lacked legitimacy. Today's debate over multilateralism and legitimacy is thus not only about principles of law, or even about the supreme authority of the UN; it is also about a transatlantic struggle for influence. It is Europe's response to the unipolar predicament.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING LEGITIMATE

AMERICANS MIGHT be tempted, therefore, to dismiss the debate over legitimacy as a ruse and a fraud. They should not, however. During the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush's top foreign policy adviser, Condoleezza Rice, derided the belief, which she attributed to the Clinton administration, "that the support of many states--or even better, of institutions like the United Nations--is essential to the legitimate exercise of power." But it turns out that even the Bush administration has felt compelled to seek European approval for its actions, and in precisely the forum where Europeans insisted that approval be sought: the UN Security Council. The United States may not have needed the support of France and Germany, but it wanted at least the support of the United Kingdom to help it invade Iraq. Bush officials well understood that the American people wanted and needed the patina of international legitimacy that Blair's support would provide. There can be no question, moreover, that the Bush administration has suffered, abroad and at home, from its failure to win Europe's full backing (and thus a broader international legitimacy) for the invasion of Iraq.

There are indeed sound reasons for the United States to seek European approval. But they are unrelated to international law, the authority of the Security Council, and the as-yet nonexistent fabric of the international order. Europe matters because it and the United States form the heart of the liberal, democratic world. The United States' liberal, democratic sensibilities make it difficult, if not impossible, for Americans to ignore the fears, concerns, interests, and demands of their fellows in liberal democracies. U.S. liberalism will naturally drive U.S. foreign policy to seek greater harmony with Europe.

The alternative course would be difficult for the United States to sustain. It is unclear whether the United States can operate effectively over time without the moral support and approval of the democratic world. That is not, however, for the reasons usually cited. Most U.S. advocates of multilateralism insist that the United States needs the material cooperation of its allies. But it is an open question whether the United States can "go it alone" in a material sense. Militarily, it can and does go it virtually alone, even when the Europeans are fully on board, as in Kosovo and in the Persian Gulf War. Economically, it can go it alone too if it must, as with the reconstruction of places such as Iraq. (Five decades ago, after all, it rebuilt Europe and Japan with its own funds.) It is more doubtful, however, whether the American people will continue to support both military actions and the burdens of postwar occupations in the face of constant charges of illegitimacy by the United States' closest democratic allies.

Because losing legitimacy with fellow democracies would be debilitating--perhaps even paralyzing--over time, Americans cannot ignore their unipolar predicament. The biggest failure of the Bush administration may be that it was too slow to recognize this truth. Bush and his advisers came to office guided by the narrow realism that dominated Republican foreign policy circles during the Clinton years. But the unipolar predicament and the U.S. character require a much more expansive definition of U.S. interests. The United States can neither appear to be acting, nor in fact act, as if only its self-interest mattered. it must act in ways that benefit all humanity or, at the very least, the part of humanity that shares its liberal principles. Even in times of dire emergency, and perhaps especially then, the world's sole superpower needs to demonstrate that it wields its great strengths on behalf of its principles and those who share them.

The United States' conduct in Iraq today is especially important in this regard. At stake is the future not only of Iraq and the Middle East more generally but also of the United States' reputation, its reliability, and its legitimacy as a world leader. The United States will be judged--as it should be--by the care and commitment it takes to secure a democratic peace in Iraq. It will be judged by whether it indeed advances the cause of liberalism, there and elsewhere, or whether it merely defends its own interests.

The United States, in short, must pursue ligitimacy in the manner truest to its nature: by promoting the principles of liberal democracy not only as a means to greater security but as an end in itself. Success would bring it a measure of authority in the liberal, democratic world, including among Europeans, who cannot forever ignore their own vision of a more humane world, even if these days they are more preoccupied with strengthening the international legal order.

In promoting liberalism, the United States cannot fail to take account of the interests and fears of its liberal democratic allies in Europe. It should try to fulfill its part of a new transatlantic bargain by granting Europeans some influence over the exercise of its power--provided that, in turen, Europeans wield that influence wisely. NATO, an alliance of and for liberal democracies, could be the forum of such a bargain. The United States has already ceded influence to European states in NATO: they vote on an equal footing with the superpower in all of the alliance's deliberations. For decades, NATO has been the one organization capable of reconciling U.S. hegemony with European autonomy and influence. Even today, its members retain a sentimental attraction for Americans more potent than their attraction for the UN.

The challenge for the United States will be to cede some power to Europe without putting U.S. security, as well as the security of Europe and the entire liberal democratic world, at risk. Even with the best of intentions, the United States cannot enlist Europe's cooperation if the two regions disagree over the nature of today's global threats and the means to counter them. This gap in perception has driven the United States and Europe apart in the post-Cold War world, and it is difficult to imagine how the United States' crisis of legitimacy could be resolved so long as this schism persists. Even if the United States were to fulfill its part of the bargain by granting Europe the influence it craves, would Europe, with its very different perception of the world, fulfill its own? Were Europeans and Americans ever to agree about what threatens them today, they could easily resume the cooperation they developed during the Cold War. So long as Europeans and Americans do not share a common view of the world's current challenges, however, they will not join in a common strantegy to tackle them. Nor will Europeans accord legitimacy to the United States when it seeks to address those challenges by itself, especially if it uses force, which it cometimes finds necessary.

What, then, is the United States to do? Should Americans, in the interest of transatlantic harmony, adjust their perceptions of global threats to match that of their European friends? To do so would be irresponsible. U.S. security and the security of the liberal democratic world depend today, as they have for the past half-century, on U.S. power. "the United States is the only truly global player," Fischer admits, "and I must warn against understimating its importance for peace and stability in the world. And beware, too, of underestimating what the U.S. means for our own security." Yet the United States has played that role by seeing the world through its own eyes rather than by adopting Europe's postmodern world view. Were Americans now to adopt their vision, neither the United States nor postmodern Europe would remain secure for long. Today, must Europeans believe that the United States exaggerates international security threats. After September 11, 2001, most Americans fear they haven't taken those theats seriously enough.

Herein lies the tragedy. To address today's blobal dangers, Americans will need the legitimacy that Europe can provide, but Europeans may well fail to grant it. In their effort to constrain the superpower, they might lose sight of the mounting dangers in the world, which are far greater than those posed by the United States. Out of nervousness about unipolarity, they might underestimate the dangers of a multipolar system in which nonliberal and nondemocratic powers would come to outweigh Europe. Out of passion for the international legal order, they might forget the other liberal principles that have made postmodern Europe what it is today. Europeans might succeed in debilitating the United States this way. But since they have no intention of supplementing its power with their own, in doing so they would only succeed in weakening the overall power that the liberal democratic world can wield in its defense--and in defense of liberalism itself.

Right now, many Europeans are betting that the risks posed by the "axis of evil," from terrorism to tyrants, will never be as great as the risk posed by the American leviathan unbound. Perhaps it is in the nature of a postmodern Europe to make such a judgment. But now may be the time for the wisest heads in Europe, including those living in the birthplace of Pascal, to ask themselves what will result if that wager proves wrong.

ADDED MATERIAL

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