James Der Derian

9/11 and Its Consequences for the Discipline

1. Introduction

During my preparation for this essay,[1] the second anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attack was being marked across the United States by ceremonies of remembrance, religious services, and 24-hour television programming. This was as it should be, to honor the dead, to tend to the wounded in spirit, and to recognize the need for understanding. But between our desire and our capacity to comprehend a world after 9/11, a vast gulf seems to have opened, and two years later, with global terrorism still a threat and Iraq a deepening quagmire, the gap shows little sign of closing, in the practice as well as in the discipline of international relations.

To bridge this abyss, between an unspeakable act and unthinkable consequences, between past terror and the present insecurities, it will take more than memorials and public ceremonies (like New York City's Mayor Bloomberg's »apolitical« decision on 9/11+1 to read only borrowed speeches from the past), looped-viewings of terrorist attacks and military counter-attacks (the mind-numbing option of the major network and cable channels on 9/11+2), or a rash of docudramas (like the tendentious, »DC 9/11: Time of Crisis«, in which President Bush declares, »If some tinhorn terrorist wants me, tell him to come get me«). It will take more than incarcerating suspected terrorists without public hearings, infringing on the civil liberties of citizens and visitors to America, or preventive military attacks for rooting out future threats. It will take deeper historical investigations, cross-cultural perspectives, and comparative political analyses; in other words, a critical transvaluation of the current national security discourse in the United States.

Which, of course, is highly unlikely, for several reasons. First, the perceived exceptionality of the attack quickly became grounds for a reflexive act of patriotic affirmation and intellectual abnegation. Its territory under attack, the US abjured coalition politics and collective action in favor of a unilateral and pre-emptive definition of friend and foe by which the state is refortified and sovereignty is reinscribed. Second, the intellectual reaction – or rather the lack of one among social scientists – resembled the initial response to the fall of the Berlin wall, a profound event that was notoriously described by some »scientific« scholars as a single data point from which nothing important, that is, nothing verifiable, could be posited; it is always safer to wait for more data. Third, it is important to recognize how trauma

1 This article is a revised version of a talk given to the German Association of Political Science (September 22, 2003) and a review essay written for *boundary 2* (Der Derian 2003). I wish to thank the editors of ZIB and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

– from the first real-time looped images of the attack to its later manipulation by the media and the Bush administration – silenced many critics and fence-sitters alike, leaving an open playing field to the visceral hate- and fear-mongering of the political first-responders. Fourth, the politics of intimidation, less crude but no less effective than McCarthyism, grew and spread through the ranks of politicians, pundits and think-tank courtiers, stifling what little dissent existed.

To be sure, there were to be signs of a critical shift, when the quasi-peace after the quasi-war in Iraq failed to follow the script. However, I do not think that I exaggerate the overall impact of 9/11 on the American psyche and political attitude. Consider one personal experience: Several months before the war in Iraq started I was asked to present at a conference on »The American Media and Wartime Challenges«, sponsored by Triangle International Security Studies (composed of North Carolina State, University of North Carolina, and Duke University). As luck would have it, the conference took place a couple of days after the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I presented a paper that was critical of the interpenetration of the military and the media.[2]

Now, in the course of my IR career I have been attacked by some of the best (as well as the worst), and truth be told, I prefer a good fight to preaching to the choir. But this crowd was out for blood like I have not witnessed ever before. The questions (more in the category of shouted »comments«) barely rose from the mud, and got personal real quick. I could understand why the twenty or so mid-career officers from the Fort Bragg Special Operations School who were attending the conference might be passionate about the topic. Indeed, one warned me to leave by the other door since his friend – who's idea of refutation was to demand whether I had ever been to boot camp – »wanted a piece of me«.

But probably the most worrying aspect of the encounter was the agreement or acquiescence of just about every other academic in the room. Many seemed to agree with the soldiers, some more obviously than others. One co-panelist, a Communication Studies professor, pretty much jettisoned her talk to launch an attack on anyone (primarily me) who could possibly think that enemy or civilian casualties are legitimate issues for a wartime press – or academic conferences. The other, an ex-general (one of the few I guess who did not get the call to explain the war to us on CNN, Fox, ABC, or other networks), who spent most his time extolling the necessity of strategic bombing (based I guess on his experience of flying over 200 missions in Vietnam), regardless, again, of civilian casualties.

To be sure, several of the academics in the room came up to me afterwards to apologize for the behavior of the crowd (including an instructor from Fort Bragg), and a few said they actually agreed with me. However, my question to them was: where were you when I was under attack? Missing in action, I am afraid. I am happy to say the day ended on a more hopeful note. That evening I stumbled upon an impromptu peace vigil on Franklin Street in Durham, North Carolina, organized by

2 A shortened version can be found at http://www.watsoninstitute.org/infopeace/911/#; 22.3.2004.

a remarkable group of high school students and their mothers. For the next three hours the drumming, dancing, and honking by passing cars provided a fine antidote to the hate and fear I had witnessed in that seminar room.

I think it is safe to say that a critical response to the official policy of the United States to 9/11 was and will continue to be subject to political, theoretical, and sometimes even personal attack. This raises several problems for the discipline of IR that I would like to address. First, assessing the impact of 9/11 is complicated by the fact that the discipline of IR has never been very effective at studying, let alone measuring, the influence of affect – like fear, hate, and empathy – on the practices of world politics. Second, there is as well the perennial issue of how well an academic approach in general manages to elucidate the practice of IR. It has long been my position that the accelerated pace and deterritoralized nature of global politics – the »chronopolitics« that Virilio (1986) sees dominating traditional geopolitics – leaves most IR scholars in the dust. By the time data has been collected, general propositions tested, and conclusions reached, the moment of relevance has long past. Others, especially those closer to centers of power like Charles Kupchan (2002, 2004 in this issue), can better address the theory/practice gap that Alexander George and other historically-oriented IR specialists consider bridgeable by increasing the pragmatic relevance of IR theory (cf. George 1993). Third, we need to ask why opposition to the Iraq war, at least in the United States, largely came from two approaches only: the critical and realist camps.

The second part of my essay provides one strategy, among many others, that critical, continental approaches to IR can bring to bear on the terror wars. But before I do so, I think we need to seriously consider why among traditional schools of IR the realists lead the antiwar charge. Following in the footsteps (if not to the barricades) of Hans Morgenthau during the Vietnam war, »paleo-realist« John Mearsheimer and »uber-realist« Stephen Walt published high-profile renunciations of the rush to war (Mearsheimer/Walt 2003), while the likely critics, liberal institutionalists, and humanitarian interventionists like Joseph Nye, Michael Ignatieff, and Anne Marie Slaughter split hairs over the morality, legality, and legitimacy of the war, yet they did not oppose the US invasion.[3]

This lesson was brought home at the March 2003 meeting of the International Studies Association in Portland, Oregon. Motivated by the extraordinary silence at the meeting over the impending war, about three dozen IR scholars (including me) staged a silent (complete with duct-taped mouths) protest in the main lobby of the hotel. Overwhelmingly, our ranks came from the critical, feminist, poststructuralist or (and often overlapping), »foreign« representatives of IR. Moreover, it is worth noting that the past (John Vasquez) and future (Steve Smith) presidents of the ISA joined the protest – neither of whom, again, fall within the liberal institutionalist paradigm that dominates IR in the US.

3 Cf. the statements and publications compiled in: http://www.ciaonet.org/special_section/iraq/analysis.html; 29.3.2004; http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/cchrp/news.shtml; 29.3.2004 and http://www.fpa.org/newsletter_info2583/newsletter_info_sub_list.htm?section=The%20Legality%20of%20War); 29.3.2004.

I think it is possible, perhaps even necessary, to recognize the diagnostic powers that realists have recently displayed, especially in their general assessment of US national interest in the Middle East, and in their particular advocacy for proportionality between means and ends in the war against global terrorism. Realists pride themselves as depicting things as they really are, rather than as idealists might wish them to be. And by idealists we must include, in a strange convergence, the born-again fundamentalists, true-believer neoconservatives, and ardent Straussians – sometimes one and the same – who in their advocacy of regime change and human rights found more allies from within the ranks of liberal institutionalists than from erstwhile allies in moderate national security circles.

But critics from the continental approach to IR – a camp I have been known to frequent – would be loath to let realists off the hook so easily. As Walter Benjamin wrote in *The Arcades Project*, »the history that showed things ›as they really were‹ was the strongest narcotic of the century« (Benjamin 1999: 463). Contemporary realism is not without its own self-serving constructions, like the positing of an apodictic principle of international anarchy and the immutability of human nature, as well as the objectification of power, the fetishization of weaponry, and the reification of the state. In spite of all the transformations of world politics that confound many of realism's fundamental precepts, it continues to haunt IR like the undead. Fortunately, there are alternatives to realism and liberalism for understanding the world after 9/11.

My own belief is that 9/11 does represent a revolution, one that had already begun in the technology of warfare and the politics of identity, yet had failed to produce a commensurate revolution in the arts of comprehension and mediation. In the post-9/11 world, this means adapting critical methodologies that look more closely and critically at how wars of fundamentalist terror and counter-terror have become inseparable from and indeed enabled by the arts of technology: Of how terrorists used email, cell phones, flight simulators, and the internet to amass the knowledge and to coordinate the machinery that killed 3016 people and caused billions of dollars worth of damage. Of how the US military used global surveillance, networked communication, smart weapons, robotic aircraft, real-time simulation, and rapid deployment of special forces to conduct a virtuous war (i. e., low-casualty, long-distance, good visuals) in Afghanistan and Iraq. Of how the Internet itself became a battlefield, through which organizers mustered millions of antiwar demonstrators in several cities and unofficial war blogs collected and disseminated multiple accounts of 9/11, as the US-government developed new techniques of surveillance and data-mining for the war against terror.

2. *Virtual Theory*

IR scholars must offer a timely response to the method and madness of a technologically enabled, mythologically-informed war and counter-war of terror. Dismantling myths takes more than realist hardheadedness or liberal wishfulness; it takes the kind of close, critical yet pragmatic reading for which sovereign as well as virtuous

powers have little tolerance. Based on my own investigations into the military-industrial-media-entertainment network, I have put out a marker for a *virtual theory* of International Relations. In *Virtuous War* (Der Derian 2001) I write that we have accelerated beyond a »post-modern condition« (first identified as such by philosopher Francois Lyotard 1979) and plunged headlong into a digitally-enhanced »virtual immersion«, in which instant scandals, catastrophic accidents, »wag-the-dog« foreign policy, computer simulations, live-feed wars, and quick-in, slow-to-get-out interventions into still-born or moribund states have become the rule of the day.

In short, virtual theory seeks to intervene critically yet pragmatically from an intellectual distance provided by continental philosophy. It is an admittedly pluralist approach, plug and play if you will, which targets the gravest dangers in IR. It studies the often inexplicable tragedies of IR without the amorality of realism or the virtuous condemnations of liberalism. By negotiations of power and knowledge, the modern and postmodern, the empirical and critical, the classical and digital, virtual theory acts as both software and hardware for a networked global politics. A virtual theory, by the very ambiguity of its name, suggests both the creative potential of its gaze and the elusive nature of its object. Virtual theory has the potential to make meaning and to produce presence, to create the actual through a theatrical differentiation and technical vision. In shorthand, a virtual theory is: thin on explanation and thick on description; instrumented for intervention rather than interpretation; more concerned with events, interests, and matériel than agents, structures, and proofs; more interested in consequences rather than causes; not interested in how a problem is solved but why an event goes, or fails to go, critical and global. It is particularly sensitive to: accidents, synchronicities, connectivity, complexity, accelerants, catalysts, feedback, white noise, negative synergy, phase shifts, imminent threats, paradoxes, spatio-temporal rifts, and dreams.

It is important to remember that virtuality is defined by a potential for infinite reproducibility and by a capability to produce an effect at a distance – the chief source of its creative as well as destructive powers. This puts a very high premium on reflexivity in virtual theory, in the sense of a need to constantly question how through acts of observation virtual theory helps to actualize an event. It might seek to leverage any technology which can make the best possibility actual. But at the same time, it must take responsibility for constructing a world – not *ex nihilio* but *ex machina* – where there was none before.

On the epistemological spectrum, this formulation clearly places virtual theory closer to the postmodernists and constructivists than the rationalists or realists. Virtual theory repudiates the philosophical realism and positivism underlying most social science theory. Constructing a de-territorialized sense of being – neither here nor there as being but always as becoming different – virtuality represents a paradoxical extra-reality that does not fit the dominant dyad of the social sciences, the real and the ideal. Nor does it fit the neat philosophical binaries of IR: the relativism of realism and the universalism of idealism. Neither realist or idealist, utopian or nihilist, virtual theory posits future possibilities forged from the encounter between critical imagination and technological determinism.

Virtual theory takes aim at the most powerful discourses, in which material interests are instantiated through virtuous statements. At the pinnacle today would be the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS 2002). As a case strategy for virtual theory, I offer a close reading of the *ur*-document of the war on terror and against Iraq. It follows in chapter-and-verse the structure of the original, and seeks to decode the inconsistencies, contradictions, and outright mythologizing of US foreign and military policy.

Overview of America's International Strategy (Section I)

> »Our Nation's cause has always been larger than our Nation's defense« (President Bush, cited in NSS 2002: 1).

From President Bush's opening lines to *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS 2002), the gap between rhetoric and reality takes on mythic proportions:

> »Our Nation's cause has always been larger than our Nation's defense. We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace – a peace that favors liberty. We will defend the peace against the threats from terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers. And we will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent« (President Bush, cited in NSS 2002: 1).

Regardless of authorial (or good) intentions, the National Security Strategy reads more a Kiplingesque folk tale of the 19th century than a strategic doctrine for the 21st century. The rhetoric of the White House favors and clearly intends to mobilize the moral clarity, nostalgic sentimentality, and uncontested dominance reminiscent of the last great empires against the ambiguities, complexities, and messiness of the current world disorder. However, the gulf between the Nation's stated cause (»to help make the world not just safer but better«; NSS 2002: 1) and defensive needs (»to fight a war against terrorists of global reach«; NSS 2002: 5) is so vast that one detects what Nietzsche referred to as the »breath of empty space«, that void between the world as it is and as we would wish to be which produces all kinds of metaphysical concoctions.

In short shrift (thirty pages), the White House articulation of US global objectives to the Congress elevates strategic discourse from a traditional, temporal calculation of means and ends, to the theological realm of monotheistic faith and monolithic truth. Relying more on aspiration than analysis, revelation than reason, the National Security Strategy is not grand but grandiose strategy. In pursuit of an impossible state of national security against terrorist evil, soldiers will need to be sacrificed, civil liberties curtailed, civilians collaterally damaged, regimes destroyed. But a nation's imperial overreach should exceed its fiducial grasp, what's a full spectrum dominance of the battlespace for?

Were this not an official White House doctrine, the contradictions of the National Security Strategy could only be interpreted as poetic irony. How else to comprehend the opening paragraph which begins with: »The United States possesses unprecedented – and unequaled – strength and influence in the world«, and ends: »The great strength of the nation must be used to promote a balance of power that favors free-

dom?« (NSS 2002: 1). Perhaps the cabalistic Straussians that make up the defense intellectual brain trust of the Bush administration (among them: Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, and William Kristol and other advocates of the »New American Century«) have come up with a nuanced, indeed, anti-Machiavellian reading of Machiavelli that escapes the uninitiated. But so fixed is the National Security Strategy on the creation of a world in America's image, that concepts like balance of power and imminent threat, once rooted in historical, juridical as well as reciprocal traditions, become free-floating signifiers. Few Europeans, »old« or »new«, would recognize balance of power principle deployed by the NSS to justify pre-emptive, unilateral, military action against not actual but »emerging« imminent threats (cf. NSS 2002: 15). Defined by the 18th century jurist Vattel as a state of affairs in which no one preponderant power can lay down the law to others, the classical sense of »balance of power« is effectively inverted in principle by the NSS document and in practice by the go-it-alone statecraft of the United States. Balance of power is global suzerainty, and war is peace.

Champion Aspirations For Human Dignity (Section II)

> »Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities« (President Bush, cited in NSS 2002: 3).

What significance should we make of the fact that the shortest section of the NSS (barely a page-and-a-half) is on the »non-negotiable demands of human dignity« and rights, including »free speech, freedom of worship, equal justice, respect for women, religious and ethnic tolerance, and respect for private property« (NSS 2002: 3). Are these rights so self-evident and inalienable that they do not warrant further clarification or justification? It would seem so: »History has not been kind to those nations which ignored or flouted the rights and aspirations of their people« (NSS 2002: 3). And yet this universalist avowal of rights requires a selective if not outright denial of history. Where was the US-support of freedom, justice, and religious and ethnic tolerance when it supported the »second Hitler« in his earlier war against Iran? When it provided intelligence, arms, and the precursors for chemical weapons of mass destruction? When it abandoned the Shiites in the south and the Kurds in the north of Iraq after the first Gulf War?

Most significant is that these rights are considered »non-negotiable«, making war, if not the first, certainly more of a viable option when these rights are violated. In this regard, President Bush's National Security Strategy is continuation rather than a repudiation of the President Clinton's *National Security Strategy of the United States 1994-1995*. To be sure, it places greater more emphasis on »preventive diplomacy« (Clinton 1995: 17) and »multilateral intervention« (Clinton 1995: 18) than Bush's preference for preemptive war and unilateralist predispositions. But the virtuous imperatives are in full evidence in the Clinton National Security Strategy: »All of America's strategic interests – from promoting prosperity at home to checking global threats abroad before they threaten our territory – are served by enlarging the community of democratic states to help preserve them as democracies committed to

free markets and respect for human rights, is a key part of our national security strategy« (Clinton 1995: 76).

Hardly surprising, then, that many liberals, both within the government and the university, supported the war against Iraq; and hardly unfair to question the extent to which Clinton and other moral interventionists prepared the high ground for this war. Nietzsche (1968) who always detected the smell of the swamp in all talk of virtue, finds in *The Twilight of the Idols* a »bestowing virtue« in the realist's »courage in the face of reality«: My recreation, my preference, my cure from all Platonism has always been Thucydides. Thucydides, and perhaps, Machiavelli's Principe are most closely related to myself by the unconditional will not to gull oneself and to see reason in reality – not in »reason«, still less in »morality« (Nietzsche 1968: 106f).

Strengthen Alliances to Defeat Global Terrorism and Work to prevent Attacks Against Us and Our Friends (Section III)

> »Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil. War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. The conflict was begun on timing and terms of others. It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing« (President Bush, cited in NSS 2002: 5).

A war to rid the world of evil, and ending it on the hour, even one so chosen by the most powerful nation in the world, is yet another tall order set by the National Security Strategy. The war is to be fought simultaneously on multiple fronts, aiming, when possible, »to disrupt the financing of terrorism« and »to enlist the support of the international community«; and, when necessary, to »not hesitate to act alone […] to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively […]« (NSS 2002: 6). The strategy for defense might start but it does not stop at our border. States that support terrorism will be compelled »to accept their sovereign responsibilities«; »terrorism will be viewed in the same light as slavery, piracy, or genocide«; and public diplomacy will be used »to promote the free flow of information and ideas […]« (NSS 2002: 6). And should the ghost of Vince Lombardi prove insufficient (»While we recognize that our best defense is a good offense […]«), then the war must be waged at home as well (»[…] we are also strengthening America's homeland security to protect against and deter attack«; NSS 2002: 6).

In most of the sections that follow, after all the early fist-waving at terrorism and its supporters, the hand of the US is opened to the international community that must be constituted in »a war of freedom against fear«, one that has »no quick or easy end« (NSS 2002: 7). In these sections the National Security Strategy seeks to »Work with Others to Defuse Regional Conflicts« (NSS 2002: section IV); »Ignite a New Era of Global Economic Growth through Free Markets and Free Trade« (NSS 2002: section VI); »Expand the Circle of Development by Opening Societies and Building the Infrastructure of Democracy« (NSS 2002: section VII); and »Develop Agendas for Cooperative Action With the Other Main Centers of Global Power« (NSS 2002:

Section VIII). But the document seems schizoid: after a prologue in which lines are drawn and ultimatums issued, the call for international dialogue rings hollow.

The National Security Strategy might aim for peace but it amounts to a blueprint for a permanent war. Gone is any trace of the humility that presidential candidate Bush invoked in his foreign policy addresses. In its place, hubris of an epic size obviates any historical- or self-consciousness about the costs of empire. What ends are not predestined by America's righteousness are to be preempted by the sanctity of holy war. The National Security Strategy leaves the world with two options: peace on US terms, or the perpetual peace of the grave. The evangelical seeps through the prose of global *realpolitik*, and mitigates its harshest pronouncements with the solace of a better life to come. We all shall be – as played by the band as the Titanic sank – »Nearer My God to Thee«.

Prevent Our Enemies From Threatening Us, Our Allies, and Our Friends with Weapons of Mass Destruction (Section V)

> »The gravest danger to freedom lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology. When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology – when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our enemies have declared this very intention, and have been caught seeking these terrible weapons. They want the capability to blackmail us, or to harm us, or to harm our friends – and we shall oppose them with all our power« (President Bush, cited in NSS 2002: 13).

It is clear from the National Security Strategy that the end of the Cold War was the harbinger of a new world dis- rather than order. »New deadly challenges have emerged rogue states and terrorists« (NSS 2002: 13); and while they might not possess the might of the Soviet Union, they have the asymmetrical advantages garnered by weapons of mass destruction and the will to use them. Positing that traditional deterrence no longer works, the National Security Strategy presents axiomatically the right to preemptively strike against these new enemies: »The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction – and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack« (NSS 2002: 15). This is not a grand strategy; this is a blank check, to take whatever actions whenever deemed necessary against whomever fits the terrorist profile.

Facing »an age where the enemies of civilization openly and actively seek the world's most destructive technologies« (NSS 2002: 15), the National Security Strategy sanctions a counter-strategy based on superior intelligence, ethics, and technological capability: »The reasons for our actions will be clear, the force measured, and the cause just« (NSS 2002: 16). In short, war will be virtuous. First auditioned in the Balkans, and dress-rehearsed in Afghanistan, virtuous war took center stage in the invasion of Iraq. Virtuous war projects a technological and ethical superiority in which computer simulation, media dissimulation, global surveillance, and networked warfare combine to deter, discipline, and if need be, destroy the enemy. Ethically intentioned and virtually applied, drawing on the doctrines of just war when possible and holy war when necessary, virtuous war is more than a felicitous oxy-

moron. After September 11, as the United States chose coercion over diplomacy in its foreign policy, and deployed a rhetoric of total victory over absolute evil, virtuous war became the ultimate means by which the United States intended to re-secure its borders, assert its suzerainty, and secure the holy trinity of international order: global capitalism (Ignite a New Era of Global Economic Growth through Free Markets and Free Trade; NSS 2002: 17); western models of democracy (Expand the Circle of Development by Opening Societies and Building the Infrastructure of Democracy; NSS 2002: 21); a hegemonic »balance of power« (Develop Agendas for Cooperative Action with the Other Main Centers of Global Power; NSS 2002: 25); and preventive interventions (Transform America's National Security Institutions to Meet The Challenges and Opportunities of the Twenty-First Century; NSS 2002: 29).

Transform America's National Security Institutions to Meet The Challenges and Opportunities of the Twenty-First Century (Section IX)

> »Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity. They did not touch its source. America is successful because of the hard work, creativity, and enterprise of our people« (President Bush, cited in NSS 2002: 29).

The National Security Strategy calls for nothing less more than a transformation of the »major institutions of American national security« (NSS 2002: 29), in which the military and the intelligence community are to lead the way. The various tenets of the »RMA« – the revolution in military affairs – were fully evident in the Iraq war, not only in the unfolding of the war plan, OPLAN 1003 VICTOR, but by the high values placed on flexibility, speed, and information. The opening decapitation strike, the infowar of »shock and awe«, the reliance on light ground forces and precision munitions for a »rolling start«, all reflect Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's efforts to implement a radical transformation in how the United States fights and defends itself.

Ultimately, however, real-world transformations exceed the grasp of the National Security Strategy. The war in Iraq put on full display just how effective the military could be in attaining its planned goals. But what falls outside the engineering and imaginary of the plan, what Edmund Burke called the »empire of circumstance«, is in the driver's seat and beyond the cybernetic machinations of the National Security Strategy, as we see in the »peace« that followed. Many scholars saw the end of the Cold War as an occasion to wax nostalgic over the stability of a bipolar balance of power and to debate the merits of a new unipolar order. These debates continued to be state-centric as well as materialist in their interpretation of how power works. By such criteria, there was little doubt that the United States would emerge as the dominant military, economic, and indeed, civilizational power. Even in Paul Wolfowitz's worst-case nightmares, it was difficult to identify a potential »peer competitor« on the horizon.

But then came 9/11, and the shock of the unexpected rippled through the dreams of a steady-state hegemony. Asymmetrical power and fundamentalist resentment, force-multiplied by the mass media, prompted a permanent state of emergency.

After the first responders came a semiotic fix with a kick, the National Security Strategy of the United States of America. But from the tragedy of 9/11 to the farce of Iraq war, after the multilateral hopes for a »safer and better world« (NSS 2002: 1) were subverted by the unilateral nihilism of preventive war, the syntax of order and the code of the simulacrum began to break down. We caught a glimpse of a heteropolar matrix, in which actors radically differ in identity and interests (states versus super-empowered individuals), using technologies in revolutionary ways (civilian airliners to create kamikaze weapons of mass destruction, the internet to mobilize the largest antiwar demonstrations ever), were suddenly comparable in their capability to produce improbable global effects. It might be small solace, but out of this nihilistic moment might yet come a real balance of power, in which the imperial reach of the National Security Strategy is foreshortened by a secular grasp of global reality.

3. Concluding Remarks

For reasons ethical, theoretical, and technological, I believe global events more than ever require rapid yet responsible responses from scholars. There is a professional as well as a public responsibility to place 9/11 and future global events in a historical context and interpretative field that reaches beyond the immediacy of personal tragedy and official injury. At a time when political posturing stands in for analysis, press punditry mimics an attention deficit disorder, and academic conformity squelches critical viewpoints, international relation scholars must work swiftly and diligently to uncover what is dangerous to think and say, and to get it out by whatever medium possible, whether it be by newspaper, television, journal, book, or the Internet. Otherwise 9/11 will be remembered not for the attack itself but for the increasing cycles of violence that follow.

References

Benjamin, Walter 1999: The Arcades Project, Cambridge, MA.

Clinton, William J. 1995: National Security Strategy of the United States: 1994-1995, Washington, DC.

Der Derian, James 2001: Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network, Boulder, CO.

Der Derian, James 2003: Decoding the National Security Strategy of the United States of America, in: boundary 2 30: 3, 19-27.

George, Alexander L. 1993: Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy, Washington, DC.

Kupchan, Charles A. 2002: The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-first Century, New York, NY.

Kupchan, Charles A. 2004: New Research Agenda? Yes. New Paradigm? No, in: Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen 11: 1, 101-109.

Lyotard, Francois 1979: The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Manchester.

Mearsheimer, John J./Walt, Stephen M. 2003: An Unnecessary War, in: Foreign Policy 134, 50-59.

NSS 2002: National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2002, in: http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/15538.pdf; 22.3.2004.

Nietzsche, Friedrich 1968: The Twilight of the Idols and the Antichrist (herausgegeben und übersetzt von R.J. Hollingdale), London.

Virilio, Paul 1986: Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology, New York, NY.