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Seminar
American Foreign Policy extending from the Gulf War to the Conflict in
Afghanistan
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Summer Term 2002

American Foreign Policy between Unilateralism and Multilateralism

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Introduction

I. The Historical Development of the “Grand Strategies”	4
II. The Theoretical Foundation	8
A) Unilateralism	8
B) Multilateralism	14
III. The US Foreign Policy in the Conflict Area of Unilateralism and Multilateralism	
A) The Clinton Administration	18
B) The Bush Administration	21

Conclusion

References

Introduction

Through the changes in the global power structure resulting from the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the United States of America (USA) inevitably assumed the role of a “Global Leader”. This shifted position within the international community provided the American theorists of foreign policy with new tasks. It has become imperative to define the positioning of the USA in the modified global political landscape and to find a suitable strategic orientation of the activities in the field of foreign policy.

Over the last decade in particular two competing schools of thought have prevailed – in the form of unilateralism and multilateralism.

As protagonists in the field of international politics the nation states theoretically always have the choice of whether they opt in favour of the multilateral approach or if it appears to be more efficient or less troublesome to base the pursuit of strategic interests on the unilateral approach. However, the consequent implementation of the unilateral or multilateral course of political action is not always that simple and evident. The leading global position of the United States and the initial widening of the field of political action greatly exacerbate the pursuit of a clear line in American foreign policy. Nevertheless the representatives of both schools of thought developed cogent lines of argument in their quest for a blueprint for American foreign policy.

In this research paper the focus shall be upon the respective concepts and their implementation within the political framework of the 1990s. Which tendencies are evident in the foreign policy actions? Which deviations or rather parallels can be noted in the foreign policy of the Republican and the Democratic Administration?

Before analyzing the content-related dimension of the two mentioned approaches, it is necessary to shed light on the historical development patterns of the strategic policy orientation of the United States. This is important insofar as multilateralism and unilateralism can only be understood in the context of the foreign policy traditions in the United States: the basic principles and the reflections of the two different approaches can only be outlined after this. It has to be stated that it is not possible to set definitions of universal validity as the views of the respective adversaries are of a multifaceted nature in part. For this reason it is sensible to outline the respective basic structures by means of a few

representative examples.¹ Because the term “Unilateralism” is often associated with the Republican Party, while “Multilateralism” is applied to the Democratic Party, the selection of the representative examples is based on this scheme.² After finalizing the comparative analysis and once the unilateral and multilateral principles are determined, it will become relatively easy to examine their realization in the foreign policy patterns of the Clinton and Bush Administration.

I. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE “GRAND STRATEGIES”

The topic of the debate on principles arising throughout America’s entire history was not only the definition of the foreign policy objectives but also the genuine national interests.³ Thus these debates were always inalienably connected with the American political culture, which assigned a special global role to the USA. The conviction that America has an exceptional status is deep rooted and has helped to provide the nation as a whole with a sense of identity both in the interior and also in the exterior, which has helped to synthesize a heterogeneous society. This conception of their own exceptional role in the world becomes evident in the words of Thomas Paine in 1776: “We have it in our power to begin the world all over again”.⁴ America’s exceptional status was both compatible with the view of the USA as the shining example of a society constituted in liberty and the view of the USA as the striving reformer of world politics. This means that it could bear the traditions of both internationalism and also of isolationism.⁵ American foreign policy was never isolationist in the sense of global disengagement or even the abandonment of military interventions, but in the 19th century the independence of a still weak state would be secured through the rejection of the interaction in the conflict of the European powers.⁶ The words of Quincy Adams Jones best describe the American foreign policy approach in the 19th century: “Wherever the standard of freedom and

¹ Condoleezza Rice, Robert B. Zoellick, Charles Krauthammer and John J. Mearsheimer represent the unilateral approach. The representatives of the multilateral approach are Hugh De Santis, Bowman Cutter, Joan Spero, Laura D’ Andrea Tyson and Richard Haas.

² Conry B, U.S. “Global Leadership”: a Euphemism for world policeman, February 5th, 1997, Cato Policy Analysis No. 267, www.cato.org/pubs/as/pa-267.html

³ For the detailed historical background view: Rudolf P, New Grand Strategy? Zur Entwicklung des außenpolitischen Diskurses in den USA, in: Medick-Krakau, M (ed.) 1999, außenpolitischer Wandel in theoretischer und vergleichender Perspektive: Die USA und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Baden-Baden, p. 69-86.

⁴ Rudolf, p. 72.

⁵ Ibid.

independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will be America's heart her benediction, and her prayers. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will recommend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and by the benignant sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue of individual avarice, envy and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standards of freedom...She might become the dictatress of the world. She would no longer be the ruler of her won spirit"⁷.

In the American history this tradition had different forms, but its crucial facets were always constant: the reluctance to become involved in European alliances as it is expressed in George Washington's warning about the "permanent alliances" and that of Thomas Jefferson of the "entangling alliances"⁸ the non-engagement in wars of other states, the emphasis upon national sovereignty and the greatest possible freedom of choice and consequently a distinctive form of unilateralism. Despite all the common ground they shared there were also differences existing between right and left wing isolationists. Conservative isolationists were concerned that an active internationalist policy could endanger the capitalist order of the USA; liberal isolationists on the other hand were driven by the fear that the social reform policy could be undermined. No matter if they sought a deregulated capitalist or a structured social state – the isolationists focused on the power of the American role model in the world.

After the First World War the old balance and power politics should be overcome and a new world order of democratic states would be established.⁹ "Wilsonianism" the liberal-internationalist orientation intrinsically tied to the name of Woodrow Wilson created the ideological framework for the determination of America's leading global role. The internationalist ideas can be found very early in American history; Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine were sympathetic towards the foundation of an international organization. But

⁶ The development of isolationism in: Rudolf, p. 74f.

⁷ Kissinger H, 2001, Does America Need a Foreign Policy: Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century, New York, p. 238.

⁸ Rudolf, p. 74.

⁹ Ibid, p. 75f.

an US internationalist movement propagating a policy aiming at the active shaping of the international environment was not to emerge before the 20th century. From its beginnings there were two types of internationalist approach. The differences between them were solely covered by the consensus resulting from the political backdrop of the Cold War in the first two decades following the Second World War. The roots of the camps' split into a conservative and a liberal or "progressive" internationalism extend back to the period of the First World War. The representatives of "progressive" internationalism – liberals, social reformers, socialists, and pacifists were convinced that America would necessarily get involved in a lengthy war in Europe, which would endanger reformist policy in the USA. The USA went on to play an active role as a mediator and peace builder in Europe in order to prevent this occurring. Peace was not to be based on a balance of power but on democratic control of foreign policy, self-determination, free trade, non-proliferation and an international organization. The representatives of the conservative internationalism condemned the policy of neutrality and put their weight behind an international organization as well as America's engagement within it. The American unilateral capacities should not be limited by such an organization. The political and economical foundations of a global peace order, which played a much greater role for the followers of progressive internationalism, were not of much interest to the forces of conservative internationalism. The latter were more concerned with the order between the states and less concerned with internal state structures as a predisposition for a global peace order.

Though the idea of the League of Nations extends back very far in history, its establishment was a product of this new internationalist thinking which increasingly characterized the American foreign policy: "The question upon which the whole future peace and policy of the world depends is this: Is the present war a just and secure peace, or only for a new balance of power? (...) There must be, not a balance of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace".¹⁰

In addition to the traditional concern over the preservation of strategic independence and freedom of action, severe criticism arose on the obligation to

¹⁰ Woodrow Wilson, in: Kissinger, p. 243.

provide assistance contained in the Covenant of the League of Nations.¹¹ In accordance with the American constitution, the right to decide over war and peace should solely be granted to the US Congress. The United States did not join the League of Nations, but it also did not refrain from global policy making. The years between the two world wars were not by any means characterized by a total American retreat from the global political field, thus it was not a time of absolute isolationism, but more a period of semi-isolationism.¹² Nevertheless, the isolationist movement reached a climax in the first half of the 1930s due to the Great Depression. Germany's impending hegemony and the attack of Pearl Harbor 1941 completely destroyed its basis. America was no longer able to feel safe behind the protective shield of the two oceans. The counter draft to isolationism – internationalism – now ultimately became the dominant pattern in terms of the determination of America's role in the world. American politicians in the post-war period now became conscious that a multilateral economical order not only served the American's economic interests but also would prevent the formation of closed power blocks which could eventually pose a threat to the United States. The foundation of a liberal-capitalist global order of democratic states, which would be connected with a geopolitical-strategic guideline¹³ of preventing Soviet hegemony over Europe advanced to become the core of US national security policy.¹⁴ This approach was not to experience a major change throughout the Cold War years.¹⁵

In terms of the foreign policy discussion of the 1990s there are three categories, which are of importance when differentiating between the grand strategic approaches.¹⁶ The first is focused on the view of the international role of the USA, whether a hegemonic, a power-concert-policy or a balance of power policy.¹⁷ Secondly the grand strategic approaches can be distinguished by their leading world order concept: an order based on institutionalized co-operation between democratic legal states (based on the liberal tradition of international politics) or an international order based on interstate peace guaranteed by

¹¹ Rudolf, p. 76.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The geopolitical realism is an approach, which places the main focus upon the political importance of certain geographical regions and in particular the resulting security consequences. According to Mackinder, one of its most prominent advocates, the power, which controls Eurasia, will assume the global hegemony. Rudolf, p.76f.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 77.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Differentiation by Rudolf, p. 79.

power politics (in the sense of “Realpolitik”). Thirdly the Grand Strategies differentiate in their attitude towards the multilateral or unilateral approach, and thus in terms of their modus operandi of international engagement.

II. THE THEORITICAL FOUNDATIONS

In the context of foreign policy the term “Multilateralism” describes a state’s quest to assert its interests and goals through cooperation and coalitions with other states. If a state pursues a unilateral foreign policy it is supported by its own forces, irrespective of whether these are based on a strong economy, a high technological standard or on strong military capacities.¹⁸

Exact calculations are meant to serve just as guidelines, for this analysis they remain exiguous as they can only be considered in a superficial manner. It is of much more direct relevance to examine the dimension of the contents as becomes particularly evident in the recent USA foreign policy debates. The clash of these two political tenors as can be seen in academic literature and the “poetry” used for the purpose of defending or attacking the respective positions allows a more profound insight into their structural pattern. The comparative approach is the most suitable means for presenting the broad spectrum of watertight arguments, but also for locating their structural weaknesses.

A) Unilateralism

The advocates of unilateralism tend to consider the world order as unipolar. In an unipolar system there is first of all an undisputed super power – the USA -, which is superior to the other states in the economical, military and technological domain, secondly there are a couple of major powers and several powers with a smaller amount of power.¹⁹

¹⁷ The “Balance of Power” policy is meant in the sense that the USA does not act as the primary but as the secondary balancing power in the event that the regional equilibrium is endangered.

¹⁸ Center for Canadian Studies, Mount Allison University: www.mta.ca/faculty/arts/canadian-studies/english/about/study-guide/world/multilateralism.htm

¹⁹ Definition by Huntington, Samuel: The Lonely Superpower, in: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 78, No. 2, March / April, S. 35f. The understanding of a unipolar world order is only immediately referred to in the academic literature. A clearer formulation can be found in Krauthammer C, The Unipolar Moment, in: Foreign Affairs, December 1990, vol. 70, no. 1, p. 23 or Kagan R / Kristol W, The Present Danger, in: The National Interest, spring 2000, p. 58-67, in: Nye, Joseph S., Oxford 2002, The Paradox of American Power, Why the World’s only Superpower can’t go it alone, p. 154.

The unilateralists regard multipolarity as the most dangerous of all possible power structures.²⁰ Thus, only the USA, as the supporting pillar of the world order, can be the sole guarantor of global peace and security.²¹ In this context the preservation of military power with the aim of promoting national interests and defending the leading role is assigned the top priority. It is necessary to ensure that American armed forces are capable of counteracting potential wars and conflicts in the future, that they enforce their power and that they are able to fight efficiently whenever prevention fails. The reliance on one's own powers and independent actions correlate with the further expansion of the military capacities or rather a more rapid reaction military readiness as well as the acquisition and the development of new weapon technologies.

The focus of the unilateral approach is upon a consistent, disciplined foreign policy that is also closely linked to defined national interests: "Foreign policy in a Republican Administration will most certainly be internationalist, but it will also proceed from the firm ground of the national interest, not from the interest of an illusory international community."²² The unilateralism is primarily based on sober, interest lead, realpolitik-oriented objectives. On this note military intervention only makes sense when it serves the purpose of defending the "vital interests"²³ of the USA or its allies or when it is being conducted for the enforcement of clear political goals. "Humanitarian intervention" aiming at the defense of human rights in the sense of a moral responsibility is being rejected. "Military force is best used to support clear political goals, whether limited, such as expelling Saddam from Kuwait, or comprehensive, such as demanding the unconditional surrender of Japan and Germany during World War II. It is one thing to have a limited political goal and to fight decisively for it, it is quite another thing to apply military force incrementally, hoping to find a political solution somewhere along the way. A president entering these situations must ask whether decisive force is possible and is likely to be effective and must know how and when to get out. These are very difficult criteria to meet, so U.S.

²⁰ Mearsheimer J, The Future of the American Pacifier, in: Foreign Affairs, September/October 2001, vol. 80, no. 5, p. 52.

²¹ Rice C, Promoting the National Interest, in: Foreign Affairs, January / February 2000, vol. 79, no. 1, p. 50.

²² Ibid, p. 62.

²³ The threat of vital interests is related to the survival of the USA or its important allies, the economical interests or the danger of a nuclear attack. Definition in: Rudolf, p. 91.

intervention in these “humanitarian” crises should be, at best, exceedingly rare”.²⁴

The strongest argument against “humanitarian interventions” is the danger of an “imperial overstretch”. Military or political engagement in the world that is applied too broadly could weaken the competence of the American armed forces. Furthermore, a military sortie in the name of universal human rights could be regarded as an affront against national sovereignty by the other states: “Using the American armed forces as world’s 911 degrade capabilities, bog soldiers down in peacekeeping roles, and fuel concern among other great powers that the United States has decided to enforce notions of „limited sovereignty” worldwide in the name of humanitarianism”.²⁵ The term “imperial overstretch” is considered to be the potential cause of a decline by some theorists: “Strategic over-commitment first leads to imperial overstretch and then to relative decline: In order to maintain its dominant position, a state must expend its resources on military forces, the financing of allies, foreign aid, and the costs associated with maintaining the international economy. These protection and related costs are not productive investments; they constitute an economic drain on the economy of the dominant state”.²⁶

The advocates of the unilateral approach endorse the assumption of specific responsibilities in the field of international crisis management by regional players, such as the intervention in East Timor under Australia’s leadership. Greater commitment on the part of the allies at an international level, in cooperation with the USA is also welcomed: “In critical areas, U.S. allies in Europe and the Pacific can share significant burdens and make major contributions. In order to fight together their forces must be interoperable. And allies should assume greater roles in peacekeeping operations, supported by unique U.S. capabilities and backed by the hammer of its robust force”.²⁷ Some theorists even go as far as to claim that they demand broad intervention on the part of the allies without the participation of the USA; naturally, only in those cases where America’s vital interests are not concerned.²⁸

²⁴ Rice, p. 53.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 54

²⁶ Kennedy, Paul, in: Layne, Christopher: Rethinking American Grand Strategy, in: Roerke, I.: Taking Sides: Clashing Views on American Foreign Policy Guilford, Connecticut, 2001, S. 47.

²⁷ Zoellick, Robert B.: A Republican Foreign Policy, in: Foreign Affairs, January/February 2000, vol. 79, no. 1, p. 78.

²⁸ Boot, Max: Paving the Road to Hell, in: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 79, No 2, March / April 2000, S. 147.

The European Union has the intention of assuming greater responsibility in the area of defense policy, however, only if these ambitions are also supported within the framework of NATO: “Moreover, the United States has an interest in shaping the European defense identity-welcoming a greater European military capability as long as it is within the context of NATO”.²⁹ The mutual benefit results only from a single joint European defense mechanism in close cooperation with the US armed forces as the actual realities of the situation, according to this line of argument, show a wide gap between the European intention and their actual capabilities.³⁰

The recommendations of the unilateralist in dealing with Russia and China are directed at a stronger integration of these two countries in economical, political and military agreements initiated by the USA: The USA and its allies are obliged and should be ready to show Russia and China the way to explore common interests and minimize differences. If they should not succeed in achieving a policy of integration or become impossible it is necessary to shield off.³¹ The up and coming economic power China is considered to be a “strategic competitor”. At the bilateral level cooperation is generally desirable, but a confrontation becomes unavoidable if American national interests collide with the Chinese.³² Trading with China is an important tool for its further economic and political integration. The security consideration whereby the conflict potential can be decisively reduced through the economic integration of China within the international community is behind this idea. The global expansion of the free market economy and stable monetary systems is an important basic principle of the unilateral approach.

The security considerations as to the appropriate attitude in dealing with China and Russia become the most evident aspect in the words of the Foreign Policy Advisor to President Bush: “The United States should make clear that it prefers to move cooperatively toward a new offense-defense mix, but that it is prepared to do so unilaterally”.³³

Mearsheimer on the other hand considers the promotion of economical interaction with China as a mistaken means of its integration. He develops

²⁹ Rice, p. 54.

³⁰ Zoellick, p. 74.

³¹ Ibid, p. 75.

³² Rice, p. 57.

³³ Rice, p. 59.

another policy recommendation for China. A prosperous China will pursue regional hegemony, as the maximization of power assures its survival. In order to thwart such a scenario, China's economical development should be decelerated.³⁴

As the sole super power the USA is exposed to the greatest danger of attack. Consequently the advocates of unilateralism consider the installation of air defense systems as the most legitimate and sensible course of action.³⁵ Furthermore on grounds of their military and technological supremacy alone the USA possesses the power to decisively and resolutely confront the threat potential coming from the "rogue states" (terrorist activities, development of weapons of mass destruction etc.): "All states do not play equally important roles. Given America's responsibility in the world it must retain its freedom to act against serious danger (...) The United States must retain the initiative so that its opponents are so worried about what America is planning that they cannot plot attacks or new forms of blackmail".³⁶

The unilateral attitude towards such international organizations (especially the United Nations) and international law is another important issue. Below it will become evident that the major differences between unilateralism and multilateralism can be determined on the basis of this specific aspect.

In the eyes of the unilateral theorists the United Nations Organization (UNO) is just a "debating society", which by no means exists as a self-sufficient power: "At the end of the 1990s the United Nations remains, what it has always been: a debating society, a humanitarian relief organization, and an occasionally useful adjunct to great-power diplomacy – but not an effective independent force".³⁷

The major problem results from the fact that the UNO represents the interests of 188 member states. Given the extreme divergences of opinion between the members, their interests cannot be reduced to a common denominator.

Next to the reproach of complete inability to act, or rather a paralysis caused by the UN Security Council's right of veto, the reluctance to act and the ineffectiveness of the UN-Resolutions is also denounced.³⁸ Krauthammer's line of argument goes to such lengths as to describe the UNO as a threat to the

³⁴ Mearsheimer, p. 58.

³⁵ Krauthammer, p. 32; Rice, p. 59.

³⁶ Zoellick, p. 76.

³⁷ Boot, p. 145.

³⁸ See Glennon M, The New Interventionism, in: Foreign Affairs, January / February 1999, vol. 78, no.1, p. 3.

assertion of America's national interests. Firstly, the small states, which are not that powerful, use the UN General Assembly to exact political revenge on the USA. Krauthammer's view of the UNO is best described by following statement: "The United Nations is a guarantor of nothing. Except in a formal sense, it can hardly be said to exist"³⁹

Unilateralists condemn the bureaucratic complexity, the lack of transparency and interminable decision-making processes within international institutions. In the event of grave problems the dependence on international institutions could undermine the legitimacy of nation states' governments as well as that of international organizations. "A dependency on international bureaucracies for solutions to tough problems will dissuade national governments from taking responsibility for their countries' futures and will ultimately erode the legitimacy of both governments and international financial institutions".⁴⁰ Krauthammer disapproves of collective cooperation even more vehemently as it would mean: "Submerging American will in a mush of collective decision-making- you have sentenced yourself to reacting to events or passing the buck to multilingual committees with fancy acronyms."⁴¹

For the advocates of unilateralism the subordination to an international organization is absolutely incomprehensible. The ratification of international resolutions and treaties is unproductive as the US vital interests are not asserted in this way and it could eventually even harm them.⁴² Moreover, what use does a superpower like the USA have by placing the control over its armed forces in the hands of bureaucrats of less powerful states and thus limit its action of freedom?⁴³

An argument against a world order based on international law is the efficiency and promptness of unilateral actions. The unilateral actions driven by justice should receive their legal legitimacy in retrospect: "If power is used to do justice, law will follow."⁴⁴

Another argument against an order established based on an international law codex is the fact that even in such a system there is a danger of potential abuse and concentration of power: "States continue to distrust concentrations of power

³⁹ Krauthammer, *The Unipolar Moment*, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Zoellick, p. 73.

⁴¹ Krauthammer C, *The New Unilateralism*, in: *Washington Post*, June 8th, 2001, A21, in: Nye, p. 154.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Boot*, p. 145.

state. The risks posed by a universal system that provides no escape from lawfully centralized coercion remains greater than the system that lacks coercive enforcement mechanisms. No one, as yet, has devised safeguards sufficient to guarantee that power will not be abused by the strong, that coercion will not be misdirected to undermine the values that it was established to protect. Until such safeguards are devised the global rule of law will remain a dream.”⁴⁵

The existence of an international law codex appears superfluous as the theorists of unilateralism share the perception that only the assertion of American national interests creates conditions for peace, liberty and market economy at the global level.⁴⁶ The hegemony of the USA is benevolent, because it is advantageous for the entire human race.⁴⁷

B) Multilateralism

In the eyes of the advocates of a multilateral approach the world is either multipolar or “uni-multipolar”. In a system of multipolarity there are several rival or collaborating major powers, which cooperate with each other or are rivals to each other, whereas their powers stand in relation to each other i.e. are comparable.⁴⁸ A coalition of these major powers is indispensable for the handling of important international matters. The second concept of a “uni-multipolar” world appears to be more realistic and significant. In such a world there is a superpower – the USA – with its economical, technological and cultural supremacy on the one hand, and on the other hand major and medium powers, whereby their superior positions are limited to one part of the world without global capacities. The existence of smaller secondary regional powers is also recognized in this concept.⁴⁹ The background of these two concepts makes it possible to determine the basic principles of the multilateral approach. In a similar manner to the unilateral approach framework, the advocates of multilateralism also acknowledge an exceptional position of the USA in the world as well as its global leadership role. The main difference from the

⁴⁴ Glennon, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Rice, p. 47.

⁴⁷ The concept of a “benign hegemony” in: Nye, p. 154.

⁴⁸ Definition by Huntington, p. 35.

⁴⁹ Huntington, p. 62.

unilateralist approach lies in the responsibility of such a role, i.e. the interest position and the implementation philosophy.

The USA as the world's most powerful player should make an attempt to order the world according to specific norms: "The United States must attempt to organize the world along certain principles, affecting both relations and between states and conditions within them".⁵⁰ By rousing the other states to embark on a joint assertion of their foreign policy ideals, the USA is creating a stable order aimed at the protection of these very ideals: "The United States seek a world order based on peaceful relations, non-proliferation, respect for human rights, and economic openness. It must therefore convince other great powers to join with it to promote these ends, thereby constructing a stronger, more durable order that protects the bulk of U.S. interests and reduces the foreign policy burden-in financial and human terms alike-on the United States...Multilateralism while limiting, is the best way to foster a world that protects U.S. interests".⁵¹ In order to assert its interest the USA must seek to achieve concord with the other states. The ability to rely on the others assures an efficient cooperation of mutual benefit for all sides. This foreign policy concept is also called "mutualism".⁵² In this case the general concept of the international relations is characterized as "interest-based rather than moral-driven"⁵³.

An inspection of the economic level provides clear evidence of this principle. An international economical system of open markets, intensified liberalization of trade, international economy agreements and the strengthening of the foreign markets provide not only strong foreign trade partners but also an overriding advantage for the USA.⁵⁴ These agreements are best realized in a global organization based on international law. Consequently the fostering of existing multilateral regimes and the establishment of new multilateral initiatives are the top priority for the advocates of multilateralism. Many of the challenges of global dimensions such as proliferation, terrorism, violations of human rights and environmental matters cannot be met by a state on its own, instead the state is dependent on cooperation with other states within the framework of generally valid rules. Even economic sanctions of a single state can only work if other

⁵⁰ Haas R, What to Do With American Primacy, in: Foreign Affairs, September/October 1999, vol. 78, no. 5, p. 41.

⁵¹ Ibid. P. 41 and p. 43.

⁵² De Santis H, Mutualism: An American Strategy for the Next Century, in: Roerke, p. 55.

⁵³ Ibid.

states also apply them. Thus, following the multilateral line of argument, global organizations become fundamental pillars of international cooperation and order.⁵⁵

America's leadership continues to be essential for the development and protection of multilateral rules and institutions, because they protect its political and economical survival by preventing the creation of potential economical and political power blocs: "Strengthen America's alliance with the other major players- Europe and Japan- to reshape existing multilateral institutions and rules and create new ones as necessary. Emphasizing cooperation with these nations will also discourage them from turning inward or creating competing economic blocs".⁵⁶

The thought that intensified economic interdependence minimizes the potential for conflict can also be found in the unilateral approach. The major difference in multilateralism is to be found in the accentuation of broad cooperation in all fields as a necessary condition for the establishment of a peaceful world order and the guarantee for the future leadership role of the USA: "History indicates that a pre-eminent power cannot long maintain its global leadership without the support and cooperation of other nations in the pursuit of agreed-upon interests."⁵⁷

The multilateral position towards the shaping of relations towards Russia and China can be derived from this principle. In general the strategic partnerships with old, new and transitory players should be cultivated.⁵⁸ The trade relations with the up and coming economic power China should be intensified in order to ensure its integration within the international community. Russia's economic integration should be continuously promoted within the framework of the IMF and by means of cooperation with other industrialized nations. The "Cooperative Threat Reduction Program" is an effective means to achieve the deactivation of nuclear warheads on the Russian side and thereby obviate security concerns.⁵⁹ In the eyes of multilateralists the further expansion of rockets and air defense systems only evokes a threat scenario and also impacts upon the relations to

⁵⁴ Cutter B; Spero J; Tyson L, *New World, New Deal: a Democratic Approach to Globalization*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2000, vol. 79, no. 2, p. 81f.

⁵⁵ Haas, p. 43/44.

⁵⁶ Cutter; Spero; Tyson, p. 90.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Cutter; Spero; Tyson, p. 86.

the allies as well as to Russia and China: "...opponents regard missile defense as capable of contributing nothing but trouble. They see it as threatening deterrence and the arms control structure, starting with the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM); as inevitably creating major difficulties with America's allies and its former adversaries, Russia and China".⁶⁰

Even in the sphere of military interventions national and regional cooperation are the key words. The states, which would lose the most as a result of a collapse of a certain political factor in their region, should bear the greatest responsibility. In the event that the regional protagonists cannot fulfill the task of maintaining order they should be able to demand support from other states. The scope of support to be provided by the other states will be determined based on the extent to which the specific regional "crisis" affects the national interests of a very state and/or the international stability.⁶¹ "Depending on where the security threat exists, the nature and magnitude of the stakes involved, and the cost of defending common interests, different states may assume the role of sheriff at different times".⁶² The establishment of national and regional communities, the expansion of a global social network and the integration of states excluded from the global modernization minimize the risk of ethnically motivated violence, terrorism, drug smuggling and environmental pollution.⁶³

The latter aspect of multilateral order is especially interesting in terms of the analysis of the causes that give rise to terrorist organizations. According to the multilateralists, intensified international cooperation could potentially lessen the growing resentment towards the USA.⁶⁴ "In addition to distributing the burden of promoting order, multilateralism can restrain the impulses of others, reduce opposition to U.S. actions, and increase the chances of policy success".⁶⁵

To best express the multilateral line of argument in favor of cooperation based on international law, this chapter will be concluded with a quote from the Federalist Papers: „An attention to the judgment of other nations is important to every government for two reasons. The one is that, independently of the merits of any particular plan or measure, it is desirable on various accounts that it

⁶⁰ Newhouse J, The Missile Defense Debate, in: Foreign Affairs, July/August 2001, vol. 80, no. 4, p. 97/98.

⁶¹ De Santis, p. 59

⁶² Ibid, p. 55

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Lieber R, Foreign Policy and American Primacy, in: Lieber, Robert J. (ed.), 2002, Eagle Rules: Foreign Policy and American Primacy in the Twenty-First Century, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, p. 8.

⁶⁵ Haas, p. 44.

should appear to other nations as the offspring of a wise and honorable policy. The second is that, in doubtful cases, particularly where the national councils may be warped by some strong passion or momentary interest, the presumed or known opinion of the impartial world may be the best guide that can be followed”.⁶⁶

III. US FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CONFLICT AREA OF UNILATERALISM AND MULTILATERALISM

A) The Clinton Administration

The Clinton Administration came to office adopting a marked multilateral approach. For Clinton this was the consequence of the understanding that unilateral solutions are in many cases impossible: “The U.S. government is responsible for protecting the lives and personal safety of Americans, maintaining our political freedom and independence as a nation and providing for the well-being and prosperity of our nation. No matter how powerful we are as a nation, we cannot secure these basic goals unilaterally. Whether the problem is nuclear proliferation, regional instability, and the reversal of reform in the former Soviet empire or unfair trade practices, the threats and challenges we face demand cooperative, multinational solutions. Therefore, the only responsible U.S. strategy is one that seeks to ensure U.S. influence over, and participation in, collective decision making in a wide and growing range of circumstances”.⁶⁷ In the first months of the Administration the members of the President’s Foreign Policy Team uttered their firm belief in the basic principles of the multilateralists. Anthony Lake spoke about the necessity of the USA, despite its positions as the only remaining superpower, to cooperate with the rest of the international community for finding solutions in a spirit of consensus to global problems.⁶⁸ Madeleine Albright confirmed this position by making use of the formulation “assertive multilateralism“, which best describes the evident necessity of a clear and determined leadership role of the USA in order to direct

⁶⁶ Madison J, in Federalist Papers, no. 63, in: Wills G: Bully of the Free World, in: Foreign Affairs, /April 1999, vol. 78, no. 2, p. 53.

⁶⁷ The White House: „ A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement“, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1994, p. 6, in: Rudolf, p. 90.

⁶⁸ Durch W (ed.): UN Peacekeeping, American Policy, and the Uncivil Wars of the 1990s, in: Lieber, p. 344.

the UN actions towards the assertion of common interest on the one hand and to prevent the multilateralism from harming American interests on the other hand.⁶⁹

As early as 1995 the Presidential Decision Directive (PDD 25) marked a reversal from the original political intention. Although the American support for the UN was confirmed, it experienced substantial limitations: "...There would have to be realistic criteria for ending an operation; an action would be undertaken only, if inaction's consequences were clearly unacceptable, and if the risks for U.S. troops were acceptable; U.S. troops would remain under U.S. command; and no support was given to the idea of a standing UN army or of earmarking U.S. for UN operations".⁷⁰ This increasingly conditioned and selective support for the UN interventions results from the military fiasco in Somalia in 1993. The "assertive multilateralism", by Hoffmann also called the "superpower multilateralism", has not disappeared completely from the political stage after this event. The US government diplomatic pressure on the Indonesian government concerning the deployment of Australian armed forces in East Timor or the engagement of the US initiated Contact Group (instead of the UN Security Council) in the War in Bosnia were traits, which lent new expression to the notion of "assertive multilateralism". The founding of the WTO is regarded as the greatest success of this new political line of thought.⁷¹ In each of these cases the US leadership worked as a catalyst for the achievement of a consensus.

However, in addition to the implementation of multilateralism there are a variety of unilateral actions in the Clinton Era. In this sense, the USA used strong pressure on the IMF to guarantee unwise bonds and to force out financial liberalization.⁷² The result of this pressure is the Asia Crisis in 1997-98. The reproach of unilateral conduct in this case does not apply the assertion of its national interest, instead it concerns the abuse of its dominant position in an international financial organization to achieve results without the existence of a general agreement.

More spectacular evidence of unilateral practices are to be found in the bypassing of international organizations or resolutions, when these appear

⁶⁹ Hoffmann, p. 343/344.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Cohen B, Containing Backlash: Foreign Economic Policy in an Age of Globalization, in: Lieber, S. 310f.

inappropriate or exhausting. “Rather, it holds that the United States can pick and choose the international conventions and laws that serve its purpose and reject those that do not. Call it international law à la carte”.⁷³ One of these practices is the decision of the Clinton Administration to conduct “humanitarian intervention” in Kosovo 1999 solely within the framework of a NATO operation and to override the Security Council. Calculating that UN intervention could be blocked by Russia’s or China’s veto in the Security Council, a decision was made in favour of a line of the least resistance. Another calculation is that if the request for a UN resolution in the Security Council failed and the USA intervened nevertheless, the humiliation for the states, which vetoed would have been too great, thus calling the credibility of the UNO into question.

The second example is linked to the refusal of the American government to participate in the military intervention in Rwanda on behalf of the UNO. Other cases of unilateral oriented foreign policy actions with regard to international agreements include the non-settlement of the UN contribution fees, the Convention on Landmines that was not ratified, the rejection of the Rome Treaty on the establishment of the International Court of Justice, the Convention on Children Rights as well as several conventions relating to environment protection.⁷⁴ The concept “Partnership for Peace” and the decision in favour of NATO expansion in Eastern Europe were made with a minimum amount of consultation with the American’s allies.⁷⁵

The initial statement of prominent government members about promoting multilateral actions of the USA became the very opposite during the two legislation periods of President Clinton. The fostering of international organizations was not a norm; moreover they were exploited for the assertion of US interests: “...the USA has frequently resorted to what I call bossism - not merely using international agencies as instruments of U.S. policy but is if they were agencies of the U.S. government”.⁷⁶ The selection of the most suitable international rules does not fit within the framework of a multilateral American approach either. The initial “Assertive Multilateralism” appears to have changed to a “Multilateralism à la carte” in the later period.

⁷² Cohen, p. 318/319.

⁷³ Spiro P, The New Sovereignties: American Exceptionalism and Its False Prophets, in: Foreign Affairs, November/December 2000, vol. 79, no. 6, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Hoffmann, p. 345 and Spiro, p. 10f.

⁷⁵ Hoffmann, p. 347.

However, there were surely important factors, which had a decisive impact on the foreign policy actions of the Clinton Administration. These need to be taken into consideration as well. On the one hand, after the Cold War the Clinton Administration found itself in a changed global power order, which certainly brought about a loss of orientation in the terms of the foreign policy adopted. On the other hand, the Pentagon emerged as a sovereign power in regard to the decision on deployment and the formation of the armed forces.⁷⁷ In addition to the disillusion over the concept of political internationalism, especially in terms of the constrained action field and capacities of the UNO, disappointment arose over the inability of the immediate implementation of power in concrete results.
78

It is evident that there were certain exogenous variables, which influenced the foreign policy adopted by the Clinton Administration. However, the attempt to lay down clear political guiding principles fails. The question on the necessity of US intervention in incidents of intrastate crisis, or the exact determination of interventive action aiming at the defense of strategic interests or the prevention of humanitarian crisis still remains open.⁷⁹

B) The Bush Administration

“Our nation stands alone right now in the world in terms of power. And that’s why we’ve got to be humble and yet project strength in a way that promotes freedom...If we are an arrogant nation, they’ll view us that way, but if we’re a humble nation, they’ll respect us”.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, there are states of the international community, which consider the foreign policy actions of the new Administration to be extremely unilateral and arrogant. The discontent of the Western European states was expressed in the very first months after coming into office: for the first time the European allies stood aside other states when they refused to reelect the USA in the UN Human Rights Commission.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 348.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 350.

⁷⁹ „In the case of Bosnia before the spring of 1995, the president oscillated between treating it as a kind of atavistic tragedy that required quarantine to proclaiming that vital American interests were at stake”. Ibid, p. 347.

⁸⁰ „2nd Presidential Debate Between Gov. Bush and Vice President Gore”, New York Times, October 2000, in: Nye, p. 156.

After the decision to renounce the ratification of the Kyoto Convention in March 2001, the criticism on the US foreign policy solo attempt tapered. The stated reason for such a decision was the fact that the demands of the Convention were not extended to all states and furthermore the Convention could harm the American economy.⁸¹ The announcement of the Administration to expand the ABM Treaty ratified in 1972 to a form of broad Air Defense Missile System in space was also received with similarly harsh criticism.

In both cases the worry was not solely attached to the content as such, but moreover to the way in which it conveyed “without consultation or warning, policy made on the hoof, leaving allies and friends wrong-footed and unprepared to respond to domestic political and media critiques”.⁸² These decisions and actions seem to indicate a more robust “go-it-alone” strategy regarding the question of the American participation within the multilateral treaties and respect for the international law codex.

With the events of September 11 there is an about-turn in the relation of the USA towards other states. Instead of criticism, there was broad support for decisive US action.⁸³ This can be understood if we consider the fact that the USA sought multilateral support in an appropriate way, thus within the UNO and the NATO. One day after the attacks of September 11th the UN passed Resolution 1368: “condemning unequivocally the attacks on 11th September, recognizing the inherent right of individual and collective self-defense, regarding the act as a threat to international peace and security, and expressing its readiness to “take all necessary steps”. Resolution 1368 was understood by the members of the Security Council as permitting the United States to respond”.⁸⁴ On the very same day the North Atlantic Council of NATO recognized an attack initiated by a foreign country against a NATO member and declared it to be a case of “collective attack” in compliance with Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. An armed attack on one or more allies is considered to be an attack on all its ally members.⁸⁵ Thus, within 24 hours of the attack everything was already in place – the counter attack of the USA whether individually or in cooperation with its NATO allies had a solid foundation in international law.

⁸¹ Sands P, American Unilateralism, a lecture held at the ASIL Conference, March 14th 2002, Washington, www.matrixlaw.co.uk/who/article/PSlecture+unilateralism.html , p. 3.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 6.

However, the development of the next few days evoked confusion and disturbances at a global level. The September 14th cover page of the New York Times printed Deputy Secretary of State Paul Wolfowitz's statement that the Bush Administration is obliged to "end" all the states supporting terrorism.

The statement was partially revised and couched in more moderate terms by the Secretary of State Collin Powell: "We're after ending terrorism [...] And if there are states and regimes, nations, that support terrorism, we hope to persuade them that it is in their interest to stop doing that. But I think 'ending terrorism' is where I would leave it and let Mr. Wolfowitz speak for himself."⁸⁶

Slowly unilateral approach elements began to predominate, which is decisively expressed in the efforts for the establishment of military tribunals with the right of exclusive jurisdiction for the suspects of the September 11 attacks. The unilateral orientation of the Bush Administration seemed to fade into the background to a small extent. Bush's State of Union Address once again evoked severe criticism. The reference to the "Axis of the Evil" undermined the European endeavors to support the reformist regime of President Khatami in Afghanistan and endangered the initial success of the efforts made to foster better relations with North Korea: "The State of the Union Speech merely confirmed the Administration's blatant disregard for the efforts at transatlantic partnership, consultation and cooperation on these delicate and difficult matters".⁸⁷ This unilateral line of development cumulated in the persistent refusal of the USA to accept the status of the International Court of Justice.

The foreign policy adopted by the Bush Administration is highly paradox. Sands puts it succinctly: "Where it suits the Administration will rely on multilateral approaches, where it doesn't there is no compunction or hesitation in dispensing with legal niceties".⁸⁸

CONCLUSION

The American foreign policy of the 1990's moves down the narrow channel between unilateralism and multilateralism. The assumption that these poles of foreign policy patterns are to be assigned to the two political parties cannot be supported. As we were able to see above, the spectrum of foreign policy actions

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Sands, p. 2.

is conditioned by a large number of blocking and supporting factors. “The national interest” takes absolute precedence. In instances of doubt, in threatening situations or when asserting national values it becomes evident that bi-partisanship represents the general rule and the demand for diametrically opposed political alternatives the exception.

Both the “assertive multilateralism” of the Clinton Administration and the initially forecasted pure unilateralism of the Bush Administration did not correspond to the implementation of these theoretic ideals at any point in time.

Concepts and theories of foreign policy can solely be regarded as a coordinated system of action possibilities, but they must never be understood as concise action clusters. The terms applied in this context define the conflict in which the players are involved.

⁸⁸ Sands, p. 7.

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