September 11th 2001 One Year On: A New Era in World Politics?

Andrew Cottey*

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC, it was commonplace to say that 11th September 2001 would be remembered as a day that changed the world. One year later, it is an appropriate time to take stock of the events of 11th September and developments since then and assess their impact on world politics. In this paper I undertake such a review, advancing a number of arguments. First, not withstanding the shock of 11th September 2001, many important aspects of world politics have not changed. The basic political structure of international politics, built on the concept of the sovereign nation-state, and the dilemmas of global governance in an anarchic world arising from the state system, have not changed. Many global problems - globalisation, global warming, north-south economic divisions - have not been significantly affected by the events of September 2001. Nevertheless, the international politics did change in two very important ways on 11th September 2001. First, the terrorist attacks on the US confirm the emergence of a new type of threat: a truly global terrorist group, engaged in an all-embracing conflict with the US and its allies and unconstrained in the violence which it is willing to use. The challenge posed by al-Qaida (and allied groups) is therefore likely to be a key feature of international politics for years to come.

Second, the US response to 11th September 2001 has resulted in a new assertiveness in US foreign policy. The war on terrorism and the related struggle against the proliferation of

nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction (WMD) have become the central elements of US foreign policy. This is backed-up by a new willingness to assert US power, unilaterally if necessary. These two developments - the new threat posed by global terrorism and the assertive US response to that threat - are creating a new strategic context for the foreign policy choices of other states, which will face difficult dilemmas about whether and how to support, oppose or stand aside from the US-led war on terror. Despite President Bush's claim that 'Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists', most states are likely to be agnostic about US power in general and the conduct of the war on terrorism in particular, viewing US global engagement as both inevitable and necessary but wary of the nature and costs of that engagement. These dynamics - the new terrorist threat, the new US international assertiveness and international ambiguity about America's global role - are likely to shape world politics for years to come.

Islam, Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction: The New Threat?

Above all else, the events of 11th September 2001 dramatically highlighted the vulnerability of the United States and the other Western democracies to violent attack from what used to be called the Third World. As a number of observers pointed out, this was the first direct violent attack on the territory of the West from the Islamic world since the siege of Vienna in 1683.[1] The attack came, however, not from a state but from a non-state terrorist group and was perpetrated not by traditional military means but by using civilian technology to cause mass death and destruction. For these reasons alone, 11th September 2001 will stand as a major turning point in world history - the first time in modern history that political opponents of the West from the Third World successfully attacked the territory of the leading Western power.

As was widely observed in the immediate aftermath, 11th September 2001 was akin to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 - a wake-up call to the reality of a new threat. There had in fact already been a number of attacks on US targets outside America (most prominently the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998) and the attempted bombing of the World Trade Centre in 1993. The March 1995 sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo underground by the Aum Shinrikyo religious cult highlighted the danger that terrorist groups might use WMD. Amongst the US foreign policy elite this had resulted in growing discussion about the threat posed by the 'new terrorism', which combined fundamental opposition to the West, in particular the US, with an unrestrained attitude to the use of violence: in the past terrorists wanted a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead, new terrorist groups appeared to be abandoning this old 'logic'.[2] By the late 1990s, terrorism was a growing security concern for the US government. In 1998 the Clinton administration responded to the African embassy bombings by launching cruise missile attacks against targets in Afghanistan and Sudan. Nevertheless, the 'new terrorism' had not dramatically impinged on the general consciousness in the West, nor had it yet come to play a defining role in US foreign policy. 11th September 2001 changed all that.

Although the September 2001 attacks illustrated the ability of al-Qaida to plan and execute a terrorist attack on an unprecedented scale, the exact nature and extent of the new terrorist threat nevertheless remains opaque and contentious. Despite extensive FBI investigations, for example, it is still unclear whether the anthrax infected letters sent to US politicians and media figures after 11th September were perpetrated by a US citizen or group or a foreign terrorist organisation.[3] Terrorist groups are by nature covert and secretive organisations. Much analysis of them depends on Western governments' intelligence information. Most

Western observers are inclined to the view that 11th September 2001 represents a watershed in terms of the type and scale of terrorist activity undertaken by radical Islamic groups, in particular al-Qaida, and that further similar attempted attacks are likely. Some such as the UK Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral Sir Michael Boyce have, however, argued for a more cautious interpretation: 'the threshold for terrorist activity may have changed for ever, but on the other hand, it may subside to close to its historical norm.'[4] Despite these uncertainties, a number of conclusions may reasonably be drawn about the threat posed by al-Qaida and related terrorist groups:

- Al-Qaida is probably the first truly global terrorist group, in that its ambitions are to attack US targets (and those of its allies and supporters) around the world, it has a world-wide terrorist infrastructure and, as 11th September showed, it has the potential to mount attacks at the heart of Western societies. In contrast, most terrorist groups - such as the IRA in Northern Ireland or the FARC in Colombia - although sometimes relying on external financial support and arms supplies or having links with other terrorist groups, are essentially local organisations focused only on the immediate conflict in which they are involved.

- Although the September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon were in part symbolic, they nevertheless also suggest that al-Qaida, driven by its messianic beliefs, shows little or no restraint in the scale of violence it is willing to use. Were al-Qaida to obtain WMD, including nuclear weapons, there is no obvious reason to believe that it would not use them.

- Organisationally al-Qaida is a loose network, with semi-autonomous cells based around the world, operating under a central leadership that provides direction, funding and training. Al-Qaida has been described as a virtual state: an organisation with many of the

core trappings of statehood - central political control and direction, institutions akin to those of a state such as finance and defence ministries, a centrally controlled budget, organised and trained military personnel - but not dependent on the territorial base of a traditional state. Al-Qaida has also developed links with other Islamic terrorist groups in countries such as Egypt and the Philippines, further extending its network, but also blurring the boundaries of the organisation and its influence.

▪ Al-Qaida has significant financial resources at its disposal, derived from the business activities of some its leading members, financial support from wealthy sympathisers, engagement in international crime (such as the illegal drugs trade) and speculation on the stock market, and sometimes channelled through a network of Islamic 'charities'.

▪ The relationship between the al-Qaida and a number of states is complex and ambiguous. In the past, analysts have focused on state sponsors of terrorism, with the US identifying countries such as Iran and Syria as harbouring, financing or supplying arms to terrorists. In contrast, critics pointed out, Afghanistan under the Taliban was a terrorist sponsored state: al-Qaida provided much of the funding, military training and ideological underpinning for the Taliban regime, while Afghanistan became the primary training basis for al-Qaida. The extent to which al-Qaida may itself receive financial support from other countries, in particular Saudi Arabia and Iran, is uncertain and contentious. In other cases such as Chechnya, Georgia, Indonesia and Somalia, remote regions outside central government control have reportedly become safe havens and training camps for al-Qaida and other terrorist group members.

These conclusions suggest that the emergence of al-Qaida is a significant and new development in international politics: for the first time a terrorist organisation with global pretensions has emerged and shown itself capable of undertaking a sustained campaign of violence against the US and its allies and friends. Although there are certain parallels with the Palestinian terrorist groups of the 1960s-1980s, these groups were essentially focused on the Palestinian conflict rather than viewing their activities as part of some wider global struggle and were constrained in the violence they used. It would be misleading, however, to view al-Qaida as a monolithic global organisation with direct control over all the groups it is associated with or their activities. Al-Qaida is probably better understood as an opportunistic organisation that exploits situations, using regional conflicts as a means of building support, developing ties with sympathetic Islamic groups and establishing physical bases where the weakness and instability of states such as Afghanistan or Georgia permits. In South-East Asia, in Indonesia and the Philippines, for example, al-Qaida has developed links with local Islamic terrorist groups, but these groups' struggles remain essentially local ones against their national governments and they have not taken a significant part in al-Qaida's wider global conflict.

The overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan raises the longer-term question of how far the al-Qaida network as a whole has been disrupted. By removing al-Qaida's Taliban supporters from power, destroying its training bases and forcing its leaders to flee, the US has presumably significantly disrupted al-Qaida's activities, at least in the short term. Given al-Qaida's virtual character, however, it may also quite quickly be able to reconstitute the ability to mount large-scale terrorist operations. The fear that Osama Bin Laden and other al-Qaida and Taliban leaders have escaped and continuing efforts to capture or kill them suggests that decapitating the organisation – 'cutting the head off the beast' by removing its key leaders -

remains a central goal for US policymakers. Whether the US and its allies will succeed in this aim, and whether even this would mark the death knell of al-Qaida, remains to be seen. The covert, para-military and transnational character of al-Qaida, however, suggests that no single military battle is likely to yield decisive victory over the organisation.

The second component of the new threat is growing concern, particularly in the US, about the proliferation of WMD. There have been various attempts to link Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein with the 11th September attacks, as well as other terrorist incidents, and suggestions that he might supply terrorist groups with WMD.[5] There is, however, little convincing evidence to support this case. The real linkage between terrorism and WMD lies in the vulnerability of the US, its allies and its interests to attack by both means. Bordered by the world's two largest oceans and with overwhelming military superiority, the US is essentially invulnerable to attack by conventional means. Terrorism and WMD are the only means by which America's enemies might bring the threat of violent attack or retaliation to US territory. Nuclear weapons also remain the one great strategic equaliser by which weaker enemies might counterbalance US military superiority. Concern about the proliferation of nuclear weapons has grown since the early 1990s. In the wake of the 11th September 2001, however, the issue was bound to assume much higher prominence. The link was made most explicit in President George W. Bush's January 2002 State of the Union address, where he defined preventing 'terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological and nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world' as a second 'great objective' alongside countering terrorism. Bush used the same speech to define Iran, Iraq and North Korea, and their pursuit of WMD, as an 'axis of evil'.[6]

Like terrorism, however, the extent and nature of the threat posed by the proliferation of WMD is opaque and contentious. In the wake of India and Pakistan's 1998 nuclear weapons tests

and revelations that Iraq was much closer to developing nuclear weapons at the time of the 1990-91 Gulf War than had previously been thought, there can be no doubt that there is a very real risk of a growing number of states obtaining nuclear weapons. Iraq, North Korea and Iran are the main states thought to be developing nuclear weapons. These states and a number of others - Egypt, Libya, Syria and Sudan - are also believed to possess or be developing chemical and/or biological weapons. How far Iraq, North Korea and Iran have moved in the development of nuclear weapons, how quickly they might be able to achieve that goal and what they might use nuclear weapons for, however, remain contentious. Some reports suggest that Iraq may now be five years or less away from developing nuclear weapons and this provides the context for a possible US war to remove Saddam Hussein from power. North Korea is thought to have developed weapons grade plutonium at the beginning of the 1990s, which has not been fully accounted for. Iran is developing a nuclear power programme that might provide it with weapons grade nuclear materials. The most likely targets for nuclear weapons developed by these states are neighbouring countries or the forward-deployed military forces of the US or its allies. In the longer term, however, the possibility of their developing long-range missiles capable of targeting US territory cannot be rule out. Europe's geographically proximity to Iraq and Iran means that it could become vulnerable to these countries missiles before the US does.

Addressing the challenge of WMD proliferation is likely to pose serious dilemmas in coming years. The global double-standard, whereby the established nuclear powers (the US, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China) retain their own nuclear arsenals, turn a blind eye to some states developing nuclear weapons (Israel and to some extent since 1998 India and Pakistan) but insist that other states must not be allowed to possess such weapons, makes the building of an international coalition to prevent proliferation inherently difficult. States have

traditionally pursued a variety of strategies designed to prevent proliferation: political and diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, export controls and multilateral arms control agreements (such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty). As the Iraqi case illustrates, however, in extremis there is no guarantee that such approaches will work. The prospect that Iraq and other states may develop WMD has put the option of military action to prevent states acquiring such weapons on the agenda. What has changed dramatically since 11th September 2001 is the willingness of the US to consider this option. The US (and Britain) have already used military force in the form of limited airstrikes in efforts to prevent Iraq developing WMD, in particular during the 1998 operation *Desert Fox* (- Israel's 1981 airstrikes on Iraq's Osiraq nuclear reactor provided an earlier precedent). Since September 2001, however, the Bush administration has moved towards the more radical position of advocating 'regime change' in Iraq, to be achieved by military force if necessary, in order to prevent that country developing nuclear weapons. It remains to be seen whether the US will indeed go to war to overthrow Saddam Hussein, under exactly what circumstances such action may be taken (for example, with or without the explicit endorsement of a UN Security Resolution), whether such action will be successful and what wider impact it may have. Whatever its specific impact, the use of military force to achieve the twin goals of preventing WMD proliferation and imposing regime change on Iraq would be a radical step. The more general argument behind the Iraqi case is that the threat posed by the proliferation is so great that states seeking to acquire WMD may, in effect, forfeit their sovereignty and become subject to externally imposed regime change as a means of preventing them obtaining such weapons. Military action to overthrow Saddam Hussein, and its authorisation (or not) by the UN Security Council, may therefore have very important long-term precedent-setting implications.

Beyond the specific challenges posed by terrorism and WMD, lies the larger question of how far the attacks of 11th September 2001 were the first blow in a wider global conflict - a new third world war between the US (and its allies) and radical Islamic opponents.[7] Some Western observers view al-Qaida and its like as representing an ideological opponent to liberal democracy akin to communism. From this perspective, the US-led war on terrorism may be similar to the Cold War against the Soviet Union: a prolonged, era defining conflict against an irreconcilable enemy, involving the mobilisation of all available resources. As Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay put it, the war on terrorism may be 'nasty, brutish and long'.[8] Such views also echo Samuel Huntington's infamous 'clash of civilizations' thesis, with its argument that the twenty-first century will be defined by the conflict between Western and non-Western civilizations.[9] There is some truth to these arguments. Al-Qaida and its supporters are undoubtedly ideological irreconcilable with Western liberal democracy To the extent that it has the means al-Qaida would doubtless wish to make the conflict truly global. The legacy of past Western imperialism, the current US/Western domination of world affairs, the global divide between rich and poor and specific US policies (such as support for Israel in its struggle with the Palestinians and backing authoritarian regimes such as that in Saudi Arabia), furthermore, contribute to wider anti-Americanism/anti-Westernism in much of the world and sympathy, if not support, for those such as al-Qaida and Saddam Hussein who dare to defy the US and the West.

Viewing 11th September 2001 as the first blow in a new global conflict akin to the Cold War, however, risks over-simplifying a complex reality and exaggerating the scale of the threat posed by al-Qaida. While there is undoubtedly enormous resentment towards the US and the West in much of the Islamic world and the Third World more generally, this is often mixed with a strong desire to enjoy the benefits of Western-style democracy, freedom and prosperity.

Notwithstanding the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the emergence of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in the 1990s, the wider support for fundamentalist Islam that has sometimes been predicted has not emerged. Before the 1990-91 Gulf War and the US intervention in Afghanistan after September 2001, some predicted a 'rising of the Arab street' that might result in the overthrow of Western allies in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere and the widespread establishment of fundamentalist Islamic regimes. While it remains possible that a US war to overthrow Saddam Hussein could trigger radical political change across the greater Middle East, the historical record suggests that this is far from inevitable. Beyond the Middle East, in places such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Somalia, while al-Qaida has built ties with indigenous Islamic terrorists and the US has since September 2001 supported anti-terrorist operations, the conflicts within these states remain essentially local ones and not at heart part of a broader global struggle. While the threat posed by al-Qaida and its allies is real and very serious, their ability to mobilise a wider global political campaign against the West and destabilise or take control of many countries should not be exaggerated. In the worst case, rhetoric and policies which view all politicised Islam and all terrorist groups as part of a larger global campaign against the US and its allies risk exacerbating tensions between the West and the Islamic world and making Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations a self-fulfilling prophecy.

America's New Assertiveness

The attacks of 11th September 2001 have had a dramatic impact on US foreign policy. Given America's status as the world's only superpower, these shifts in US foreign policy will have a major impact on international politics more generally. The war on terrorism and the related struggle against the proliferation of WMD have become the defining features of US foreign policy. Within this context, there is a new willingness on the part of the US to assert its

power internationally and unilaterally if necessary. US economic and military power relative to that of the rest of the world did not, of course, change on 11th September 2001, but America's willing to use that power did. Despite having only 4.7% of the world's populations, the US has 31.2% of global gross domestic product (GDP) and 36.3% of global defence spending.[10] The only broad comparator with the United States in global power terms is the European Union (EU). While the EU possesses a broadly similar proportion of global GDP, the absence of a single centralised European foreign policy means that the EU is unlikely to assert itself globally in the way the US does. The power gap between the US and the rest of the world is greatest in the military sphere: depending on calculations, the US spends more on its military than the combined defence budgets of the next nine to fourteen largest defence spenders globally. The legacy of six decades of global engagement since the Second World War gives the US a unique network of global political, economic and military ties and an unparalleled capacity to project military power across the world. With comparatively high US spending on research and development and economies of scale, most observers suggest that the military gap between the US and the rest of the world is likely to widen further.

For much of the 1990s, the US was what Richard Haass called the 'reluctant sheriff': the world's only superpower, but one often reluctant to engage and wary of the costs of engagement where its immediate interests were not obvious.[11] Now perceiving itself directly threatened, the US is asserting its power and mobilising national resources in the war against terrorism. Most obviously, this has resulted in a new willingness to use military force as witnessed by the intervention in Afghanistan and the current debate over Iraq. The Bush administration has also requested and the Congress has approved a major increase in defence spending, a doubling of the US foreign aid budget and the creation of a new Department of Homeland Security with a budget

of more than \$35 billion a year.[12] At a diplomatic level, in bilateral relations with other states and in international organisations, the US has worked since September 2001 to enhance law enforcement, intelligence cooperation and related counter-terrorism efforts. In combination these measures do indeed amount to a fundamental re-orientation of US foreign policy towards the goal of countering terrorism.

Will the US intervention in Afghanistan and a possible war to overthrow Saddam Hussein herald a new era in US interventionism? At one level, the removal of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was a remarkable victory for the US, which achieved its core objective quickly, at very low costs to itself (especially in terms of American casualties) and by deploying relatively small numbers of ground troops. The circumstances in Afghanistan, however, were unusual if not unique: the Taliban was relatively weak militarily and increasingly unpopular with the Afghan people, while the US had a ready-made ground force in the Northern Alliance (armed with Russian weapons). Despite its relatively easy military victory, the Bush administration resisted calls for the US to participate in the subsequent peacekeeping mission (the International Security Assistance Force or ISAF) and has been reluctant to take a leading role in post-war nation-building. Iraq could prove a much more significant and potentially difficult test case. Despite speculation about the possibility of airlifting a relatively small US force (50,000 troops or less) into Baghdad to overthrow Saddam Hussein, the US is unlikely to risk such a force being isolated in adverse circumstances. In the absence of an ally equivalent to the Afghan Northern Alliance (the Kurds being no match in conventional military terms), the US is most likely to deploy a larger ground invasion force (perhaps 200,000 or more soldiers). The successful removal of Saddam Hussein, if achieved with relatively few US casualties, could set a significant precedent in terms of US willing to use force. A failed or much more costly invasion could have

the reverse effect, reinforcing American reluctance to deploy ground forces in risky circumstances. Assuming Saddam Hussein is overthrown, however, the fact of US military occupation of the country and the risk of a weakened Iraq becoming a source of instability are likely to make it practically and politically difficult, if not impossible, for the US to withdraw rapidly. Despite the Bush administration's instincts, therefore, intervention in Iraq is likely to draw the US into the complex longer-term tasks of peacekeeping and nation-building to a much greater degree than in Afghanistan. A successful re-building of Iraq could also encourage greater US support for similar projects elsewhere.

The attacks of 11th September 2001 have reinforced a longer term trend in US foreign policy towards unilateralism. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Clinton administration advanced the concept of muscular multilateralism: using US power to support and reinforce multilateral institutions and policies. Driven by a Republican Congress, however, the US rejected a number of key international agreements: the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Kyoto agreement on global warming and the newly established International Criminal Court (ICC). This reflected a more general antipathy toward multilateralism and constraints on US power and a new willingness to act unilaterally. The September 2001 attacks have significantly reinforced this trend. America has acted largely unilaterally in Afghanistan, with its European allies for example concerned at US wariness of NATO in this context and American rejection of offers military help. The US's apparent willingness to intervene in Iraq despite the opposition of most of its allies and if necessary without the endorsement of the UN Security Council has further exacerbated concerns about American unilateralism. The Bush administration's withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in order to build a national missile defence system and President Bush's refusal to attend the September 2002 UN Earth Summit in Johannesburg are cited as

further examples of this trend. In part, these steps reflect the natural inclinations of the Bush administration. In the wake of 11th September 2001, however, there is a broad consensus within America that the country faces a dramatic new threat to its national security and this consensus has created a new willingness to assert US power, unilaterally if necessary, that extends beyond the shift from one administration to another.

By provoking decisively assertive American action the attacks of 11th September 2001 have both highlighted the dramatic scale of America's global power but also triggered a new debate on America's role in the world. At present, US foreign policy appears to be dominated by unilateralism, especially that of the hawks within the Bush administration such as Vice-President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. From this perspective, US military power is central to international order, the US must be willing to use that power and constraints on American power and freedom of action should be rejected, while the US should not engage in activities - such as peacekeeping and nation-building - that are not central to its interests. Pressure from these voices to take military action in Iraq despite strong opposition from America's allies and without authorisation by the UN Security Council has, however, provoked renewed debate and strong criticism of the unilateralist hawks. Figures such as James Baker, Secretary of State in George Bush senior's administration at the time of the 1990-91 Gulf War and a leading figure in the Republican foreign policy establishment, have argued that the US needs to build support amongst its allies, press for UN Security Council authority and develop plans for post-war nation-building before an military action in Iraq.[13] More generally, criticism is emerging in America that despite its enormous power even the US cannot achieve its long term goals alone and that by acting unilaterally it undermines the political alliances and institutions that are vital to long term American security and prosperity.[14] Ironically, critics of US

unilateralism have taken to quoting Henry Kissinger, usually seen as the high priest of realpolitik, to the effect that US foreign policy must rest not just on power but also an international 'moral consensus'.[15] While the aftermath of 11th September 2001 has dramatically highlighted America's global power and produced a new willingness to use that power, it has also provoked the beginnings of a new and vitally important debate on how the US should use that power - and the outcome of that longer term debate remains to be seen.

Allies, Enemies and Agnostics

In his speech to the Joint Session of Congress on 20th September 2001 President Bush declared that in the new war on terror 'Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.'[16] In defining Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an 'axis of evil' President Bush reinforced this image of a world divided between good and evil. After the shock of 11th September 2001, the vast majority of states - and not just long-standing American allies, but also countries such as China, India, Iran and Russia - condemned the terrorist attacks and offered various forms of practical support to the US. As a front-page editorial in the left-leaning *Le Monde* put it, 'We are all Americans now.'[17] International support for the US reflected genuine revulsion at the terrorist attacks, but also common experiences of 'terrorism' in a number of cases, as well as more narrow calculations of national interest in building cooperation with the US. Such international support was given substance in Afghanistan, where the vast majority of countries broadly supported US military action to remove the Taliban regime and disrupt al-Qaida.

A year later the international consensus in support of the US has begun to fray. This reflects a number of factors. First, many people and governments, while broadly sympathetic to the US anti-terrorist struggle, have differences with the US about how that struggle should be pursued - for example, over the appropriate balance between military action and other measures

or about the extent to which the US having taken military action in somewhere such as Afghanistan has a subsequent moral and political duty to support nation-building. The debate over possible intervention in Iraq has brought such differences to the fore, with many critics wary of the US linkage of the war on terrorism to efforts to prevent the proliferation of WMD, and demands that the US do more to promote a just settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before taking action against Iraq. Second, many people and governments around the world have deeply ambiguous views of the US and its current preponderance of international power. While acknowledging the inevitability and necessity of US engagement, other states are concerned about both the general implications of America's unfettered superpower status and specific US policies on issues ranging from missile defences to global warming to the Middle East. In short, despite President Bush's injunction that you are either with us or against us, the majority of other countries are neither uncritical true believers in, nor unalloyed critics of the US but rather agnostics seeing both benefits and dangers, good and bad, in American power and foreign policy. What has changed in this relationship is that after 11th September 2001, the rest of the world now faces a United States more conscious of and willing to assert its power, for which the war against terrorism and the struggle to prevent the proliferation of WMD are now central to its foreign policy - and its relations with all other states.

A brief review of three regions - Europe, Russia and the Middle East - illustrates the way in which these dynamics have shifted since 11th September 2001. For much of the twentieth century Europe was central to American foreign policy - during the two World Wars and the Cold War. At the beginning of the twenty-first century Europe is at peace and no strategic threat such as that posed by Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union is on the horizon. After 11th September 2001, however, US foreign policy priorities will increasingly be defined by the twin challenges

of the war on terrorism and the proliferation of WMD. In these circumstances, transatlantic relations will increasingly be shaped by Europe's role in and response to American-led policies in these areas. Within the US, for example, there is a growing body of opinion which suggests that NATO is irrelevant to the new security challenges: as an essentially Euro-atlantic alliance NATO has little role to playing in address problems in areas such as the Middle East or Asia, while the European allies lack the power projection capabilities to make a significant contribution to military operations outside Europe. At the same time, the divergent strategic cultures of the US and Europe are becoming increasingly clear, with the US emphasising hard military and economic power and the Europeans stressing the soft power of multilateral institution-building and economic aid.[18] British Prime Minister Tony Blair's clarion call to use 11th September 2001 as an opportunity to build a new international order by addressing global poverty and other problems that provide the breeding ground for terrorism, for example, found little resonance in Washington, DC.[19] These European-American differences predate September 2001, but they have been deepened by divergent responses to the terrorist attacks on the US. They may not herald a fundamental split in relations between long-standing allies, but they do suggest that Europe will in future be less important to the US and European foreign policy choices will increasingly be shaped by the challenge of responding to - whether by supporting, opposing or standing aside from - American policies elsewhere in the world.

In stark contrast to the growing tensions between America and its European allies, relations between the US and Russia have improved dramatically since September 2001. Russian President Vladimir Putin was amongst the first world leaders to offer whole-hearted support to the US after the terrorist attacks. Russia offered strong support to the US in Afghanistan, providing arms to the Northern Alliance, intelligence to the US and acquiescing in the

establishment of US military bases in the Central Asia states that used to be part of the Soviet Union. Elsewhere Russia has accepted the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, toned down opposition to US national missile defence plans and appears willing to live with the further enlargement of NATO into Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltic states on Russia's border. Russia's new friendship with America is based on a number of factors. Having lived with the Chechen conflict for almost a decade, experienced periodic terrorist attacks in Moscow and other Russian cities and facing a swathe of unstable Islamic states on its southern border, Russians view terrorism and Islamic radicalism as a threat they share in common with the US. Economically, Russia is in no position to engage in a new nuclear arms race with the US and needs American support for investment in its economy and membership of the World Trade Organisation. From a US perspective, Russia is now a valuable ally in places such as Central Asia, has an important role to play in helping to prevent proliferation and is a potentially significant source of oil and gas that may help to reduce dependence on supplies from the Middle East. The new US-Russian partnership could yet be disrupted by Russian sales of nuclear technology or materials to countries such as Iran or Russian domestic opposition to President Putin's cooperation with the US, but on balance the likelihood is that the new partnership will last beyond the immediate aftermath of 11th September 2001.

In the Middle East the attacks of 11th September 2001 have not yet had a fundamental impact on the region's international politics, but there is growing speculation - from at least two different but inter-related directions - that a potentially seismic shift in the region's and its relations with the US could occur over the next few years. Critics of US policy argue that against a background of growing anger towards America and Israel and the continuing oppression of Palestinian aspirations for statehood, US military action in Iraq could trigger serious instability

across the region, perhaps resulting in the overthrow of American allies in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan and their replacement by fundamentalist Islamic regimes - as occurred in Iran in 1979. In the worst case, a Taliban/al-Qaida type regime might gain control of Saudi Arabia's oil and/or Pakistan's nuclear weapons. As was argued above, similar dire predictions have been made in the past and the likelihood of such a development remains a moot point.

An alternative scenario suggests that the successful overthrow of Saddam Hussein could result in the establishment of a democratic Iraq with good relations with the US - a development that could have dramatic implications for the wider Middle East. As has been widely noted, 15 of the 19 11th September 2001 highjackers were Saudi nationals and Saudi Arabia is key US allies in the region. Against this background, there is intensifying criticism within the US of the wisdom of supporting authoritarian regimes that provide the breeding ground for and, it is argued, in the case of Saudi Arabia, directly sponsor Islamic terrorism.[20] A recent presentation to the US Department of Defense's Defense Advisory Board by a Rand Corporation researcher, for example, described Saudi Arabia as 'the kernel of evil, the prime mover, the most dangerous opponent', arguing that Saudis are 'active at every level of the terror chain'.[21] Although official US policy has not changed, some argue that regime change in Iraq could both open Baghdad's oil fields to the West and provide a model of democracy in the Middle East, thereby allowing the US to abandon its dependence on Saudi oil and put pressure on Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern states to democratise. In the medium term such a scenario would radically alter Middle Eastern politics and the US's relationship with the region - allowing the US and other Western states to overcome the historic charge that they put oil before democracy. Such scenarios risk descending into rose tinted crystal ball gazing, and a wide range of messier, more contradictory outcomes may be equally if not more likely. Nevertheless, the fact that such scenarios are now

being discussed suggests that the range of possibilities within the Middle East and for US policy towards the region may be more open than for many decades.

Conclusion

There is much, of course, that did not change on 11th September 2001. The fundamental problem of an international political order based on nation-states, combined with the inability of many states to provide for the welfare and security of their citizens and the demands of global governance in an anarchic world, remains. Many global challenges - the appalling economic disparities between the rich north and the impoverished south, global warming, AIDS - have not been significantly altered by the 11th September 2001. Some important political developments - the rising power of China and India, for example, and the challenges this poses for these states' neighbours but also the US and other states - may not in the long run be greatly affected by the events of 11th September 2001. Nevertheless, the world has changed in two very important ways. First, the development of al-Qaida and its ability to amount a terrorist attack of the scale of that on 11th September 2001 does represent the emergence of a new and serious threat to the security of the United States and other Western democracies. For the first time in modern international politics a truly global terrorist network has emerged, intent on waging a global campaign against the US and its allies and unconstrained in the violence it is willing to use. The extent to which al-Qaida has been disrupted by the US intervention in Afghanistan is unclear, but the possibility of terrorist attacks on a similar or worse scale to those of September 2001 will remain a serious concern of governments for years to come.

Second, the terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001 have triggered a new assertiveness in US foreign policy. The war on terrorism and the related struggle to control the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have become the central elements of US foreign and security

policy. This is backed up by a new willingness to assert US power, unilaterally if necessary. Given the America's global preponderance of power, especially military power, this shift in US policy will in itself affect many other aspects of world politics and many other relationships. How the US will choose to use its power, however, is less clear. There is an emerging debate within the US between right-wing unilateralists arguing for the decisive use of US military power free from the constraints of permanent allies and multilateral institutions and more moderate voices calling for the maintenance of an international framework that supports and legitimates the use of US power. The outcome of this debate remains to be seen, but will have a major impact on America's relations with the rest of the world for years to come.

The new terrorist threat posed by al-Qaida and the new US assertiveness in response to that threat will shape the foreign policy choices facing other states. Although many foreign policy issues will not be greatly affected by the war on terrorism, all states will face choices about how far and how to support, oppose or stand aside from US-led policies in countering terrorism and proliferation. Despite President Bush's argument that 'either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists', many states are likely to be to some degree agnostic about US power in general and the war on terrorism in particular. Beneath such specific issues, the new terrorist threat and the US response to that threat pose fundamental political and ethical questions. In what circumstances, for example, is it right to use military force against terrorists? What is the appropriate balance between measures to prevent terrorism and the protection of civil liberties? To what extent is it possible and appropriate to address the political grievances and/or socio-economic circumstances that give rise to terrorism? In the immediate aftermath of 11th September 2001, it is understandable that such questions have not been fully addressed. Yet

these are fundamental questions of our age that need to be seriously considered by all governments and citizens.

Much remains contingent, dependent on specific events that will themselves have unpredictable knock-on effects. A world in which al-Qaida succeeds in mounting further major terrorist attacks will be different from one in which international efforts succeed in containing the terrorist threat. The impact of successful US military action to overthrow Saddam Hussein would lead down one path, while a failed intervention would have very different consequences. Essentially unilateral US action in Iraq could have quite different implications from action taken with the support of a wide coalition of allies and the endorsement of the UN Security Council. Whatever the outcome of such specific events, however, the new terrorist threat posed by al-Qaida and the US response to that threat are likely to shape international politics for years to come.

* Dr. Andrew Cottey is lecturer and Jean Monnet Chair in European Political Integration in the Department of Government, University College Cork.

NOTES

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11 Richard N. Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States after the Cold War*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997).

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13 Julian Borger, 'Daggers drawn in the house of Bush', *The Guardian*, (28 August 2002).

14 Michael Hirsh, 'Bush and the World', *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2002, <http://www.foreign affairs.org/search/prtintable_fulltext.asp?i=20020901FAEssay9731.xml>, and G. John Ikenberry, 'America's Imperial Ambitions', *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2002, <http://www.foreign affairs.org/search/prtintable_fulltext.asp?i=20020901FAEssay9732.xml>.

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16 President George W. Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, United States Capitol, Washington, DC, 20 September 2001, Whitehouse website <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

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