

the end of the Vasco da Gama era

THE NEXT LANDSCAPE
OF WORLD POLITICS

Coral Bell

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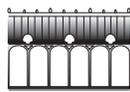
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Contents

Introduction	1
The coming and going of the unipolar world	3
The global redistribution of power	9
The prospective structure of world politics	13
Balance and (hopefully) concert?	15
Islam and the society of states	35
What's past is prologue?	39
A clash of norms?	43
The options for Canberra	49
Retrospect	55
Notes	57
Lowy Institute Papers: Other titles in the series	61

Introduction

The next landscape of world politics is just beginning to be visible through the lingering twilight of the unipolar world. It is being shaped by four powerful historical processes. The first, and currently dominant, is what has been called the end of the Vasco da Gama era. The second is the end of *unchallenged* US paramountcy in the society of states: that is the end of the unipolar world. The third is a redistribution of power not only between states but within states. The fourth, and in time probably most momentous of all, is environmental change. But that last process is already gathering a whole library of studies for itself, so I shall not consider it here, save as it affects the other three.

The changes already being effected by the combination of just those four factors seem to me nothing less than a shift in the tectonic plates that underlie the everyday world of contemporary international politics. But, as Yogi Berra once said, 'Prophecy is difficult, especially about the future'; so all the arguments which follow in this essay are quite tentative.

Because the rise and rise of China and India is the most dramatically visible signal of change, the current patch of diplomatic history can fundamentally be seen as the end of the Vasco da Gama era. Indian scholars have long regarded the voyages of that great navigator, along with those of Ferdinand Magellan and Christopher Columbus, as the beginning of 500 years of ascendancy of the West over Asia. So its ending has been for them a consummation devoutly to be anticipated,

THE END OF THE VASCO DA GAMA ERA:
THE NEXT LANDSCAPE OF WORLD POLITICS

ever since 1947. With the 21st century now widely regarded as likely to be ‘Asia’s century’, they are entitled to feel that their time has come.

But there is something much more disturbing in the current *Zeitgeist*. The three great civilisations of the non-West — Indian, Chinese and Islamic — are all currently demanding their places in the sun of the international community. There should be no difficulty at all with regard to India, and very little with regard to China. But the seemingly intractable problems of finding a place for Islam in the current international order are already roiling the world, and will probably do so for a long time.

All these issues will be looked at in due course. The first necessity is to attempt a definition of this ambiguous and amorphous process of change. Because of the third factor mentioned earlier (the redistribution of power *within* states as well as between them), I think it must be defined as affecting world politics, rather than just international politics. Nation-states are not the only entities to have been empowered or disempowered by the changes. The rise of ‘non-state actors’ as effective players in the game of nations is one of the processes to be examined. So are the ways in which a world of more widely dispersed power might reorganise itself, and how strategic priorities might change for many governments.

But I will look initially at the proposition that this patch of history has turned the moment of unchallenged US paramountcy (‘the unipolar moment’ which existed briefly from the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 until September 2001) back into the historically more familiar shape of a multipolar world, a world moreover in which power is more widely distributed than it has been for the past two centuries. An ambiguous new world but not necessarily an unhelpful one, nor one without precedent. Most importantly, it is a world that differs markedly not only from the mere decade-long world of the unipolar moment, but also from the 43-year span of the Cold War. In the context of history, that change may prove far less important than the current changes which also signal the end of Western ascendancy over the non-Western world, but, for the time being, it presents some complex near-term choices for policy-makers.

The coming and going of the unipolar world

The period from the end of the Second World War in 1945 until the first few years of the 21st century induced most people to think in terms of ‘superpowers’, initially two of them (the United States and the Soviet Union), and then just one. Washington, unfortunately, came to be thought of as almost omnipotent and invincible by some of its most influential citizens ‘within the beltway’. The notion of ‘superpowerdom’ still haunts us intellectually, so that China is already talked of as a superpower, and India as a coming superpower. I would argue that the category of superpower ought to be considered valid only for the 55-year patch of history from 1946 until 2001, and that we are now back with the more familiar categories of several great powers and many more major, middle and minor powers, who also aspire to be masters of their own respective fates, and can often make themselves exceedingly awkward to even the most potent of the great powers. Thus, we have a more equal world, at least in terms of some sorts of power, and, unfortunately, most of all in the capacity to do harm.

It must be acknowledged that the re-emergence of a multipolar world from an international conflict has been prematurely forecast twice before: once at the end of the Second World War, when what actually eventuated was the bipolar world of the Cold War, and again at the end of

THE END OF THE VASCO DA GAMA ERA:
THE NEXT LANDSCAPE OF WORLD POLITICS

the Cold War, when what eventuated (briefly) was the unipolar moment of unchallenged US power. But by 2007 the demographic, economic, technological and diplomatic indicators all pointed more clearly to a global ongoing redistribution of power. And there has been yet another more unexpected factor, a sort of visible diminution of the effectiveness and prestige of conventional military capacity, which affects especially US relations with non-state actors and what are classed in Washington as 'rogue states'.

The three pillars of the unipolar world of US paramouncy were its unequalled economic strength, its worldwide diplomatic clout and its unprecedented military superiority. All three have been subjected to considerable erosion since 2003.

The unipolar world, and the bipolar world which preceded it, were both the products of global conflict: first the Second World War, then the Cold War. So it is not really surprising that the second half of the 20th century, which they consumed between them, seemed to be dominated by military power, and the sort of economic capacity and diplomatic skills which make for success in military enterprises. The diplomatic strategists who devised the underlying concepts which in time won the Cold War have come to be called 'the wise men', and the name seems fully warranted in retrospect.¹ But, of course, that is not how it seemed at the time.

Then it seemed to be mostly a lurching from crisis to crisis. As late as 1983, Armageddon looked to many 'insiders' to be possibly just round the corner, and expert opinion put the possible death toll of the first nuclear exchange at between 150 million and 200 million. Only two years later, surprisingly, Mikhail Gorbachev was in power in Moscow, and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was saying 'we can do business with this man'. Four more years on, in 1989, the Berlin Wall was coming down, and the Cold War was effectively over. Those last six years of the Cold War are still deeply mysterious, but the suddenness and completeness of the Western success unfortunately bred a sort of hubris in Washington which (in combination with other factors) produced the US illusions behind the decision to invade Iraq.

THE COMING AND GOING OF THE UNIPOLAR WORLD

In retrospect, high noon for the unipolar world of unchallenged US paramouncy appears to have been reached during the Kosovo Campaign of 1999. The Europeans (who had earlier claimed that they were the natural crisis managers for the long-running Balkan crisis) were obliged to acknowledge their strategic dependence on American power, by needing to call in the US Air Force to induce Serbia to take its troops out of Kosovo, a small province of barely two million people, which should have been quite manageable by the Europeans themselves. The US Air Force did the job of forcing Serbia to the conference table in about eight weeks, with no casualties among its air crew, even though Serbia had built considerable air defences, having long feared Soviet attack. American military capacity looked invincible, and the Europeans ridiculously weak.

So did the Russians. Serbia had been an ally of sorts, and a kind of fellow Slav Orthodox protectorate from earlier centuries. While Josip Tito was alive, and the Soviet Union still in existence, the relationship had become very contentious, but there remained an assumption in Moscow that the Balkan states were part of Russia's 'near abroad', and that the policy-makers in the Kremlin were entitled to a voice in the disposition of affairs in that region. But Boris Yeltsin was then in office and the whole society seemed to have fallen into a kind of political and economic collapse, which at the time looked as if it might last for decades. The Russians did make a bit of a bid, but it came to nothing much.

China was already beginning its rise to diplomatic influence as well as to economic stardom, but was still not expected to have any voice in affairs outside its own region. A mysterious little episode occurred in the middle of the US bombing campaign, when the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was damaged by what the US Air Force said was a purely accidental error of target location. But Chinese observers interpreted it then (and perhaps still do) as a US reprisal for alleged Chinese help to the Serbian government in communications techniques. Washington apologised and paid compensation, but there are reports that Beijing has never been entirely convinced the episode was just an accident of war. The Chinese seem to interpret it as the United States saying 'stay out'. The 1991 Gulf War had already created an expectation of effortless,

THE END OF THE VASCO DA GAMA ERA:
THE NEXT LANDSCAPE OF WORLD POLITICS

low-cost US military victory. What was overlooked at the time was the prudent restriction of US objectives to those that could be accomplished without the invasion of Iraq. President George H W Bush, and his chief adviser, Brent Scowcroft, were later much reproached for not having invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein, but judging by the results when that strategy was tried by President George W Bush they were justified in their prudence.

That the most serious challenge to US power would come from a mere 'non-state actor' would have seemed at the time to almost everyone, even in the intelligence services of the West, an absurd fantasy, useful only to the writers of thrillers. The jihadists had, in effect, declared their intentions by 1983 with the blowing up of the Marine barracks in Lebanon, and had made a first attempt in 1993 to blow up the World Trade Center. But that effort had failed, and hardly anyone believed that their capacities could ever match their ambitions. Terrorist operations and guerrilla wars were fully familiar categories, but the harm they could do was seen as limited and local. Asymmetric war, as a global operation capable of serious military effectiveness, was barely contemplated, except by a few strategists — especially those on the other side.

But since the terrorist attacks of September 2001, the world has been conscious that it is today and perhaps for the foreseeable future in a period of asymmetric war. Armed forces, at least since Roman times, have of course often been confronted with insurgencies, guerrilla operations, national resistance movements, and terrorist tactics. But the current conflict seems to deserve that more portentous name on two grounds. First, the ambitions of the adversary are global, whereas those of similar militants have normally been local: a change of political or territorial arrangements in Ireland or Spain or Sri Lanka or Kashmir. The jihadists' operational capacity is theoretically also worldwide, although their operations are much easier in some places than others. Secondly, current technology of many sorts makes their capacity to inflict damage almost equivalent to that of conventional forces. Nineteen men, armed only with box-cutters and airline tickets, inflicted almost as many casualties in the United States *in an hour* as the forces arrayed

THE COMING AND GOING OF THE UNIPOLAR WORLD

against US troops in Iraq inflicted *in four years* of hostilities. Advanced, technology-dependent societies are particularly vulnerable.

That is why September 2001 seems to me the right date for the end of the unipolar world. There is a neat historic irony in the way it ended. In its long rise towards the status of potential hegemonial power (a rise which began as early as 1898), the United States never met with the sort of opposition which has been the fate of most potential hegemonial powers: an anti-hegemonial coalition. That had been almost automatic in the European balance of power system, but Britain had been the usual convenor of the necessary coalition, and it did not make that decision vis-à-vis the United States. Instead the would-be convenor of the anti-US coalition has been a stateless Saudi millionaire lurking in a cave somewhere near the Pakistani border.

The global redistribution of power

There could hardly be a more appropriate symbol of the redistribution of power, not only between sovereign states but also within societies, than that. But although military capacity is, in the short term, the cutting edge of change, long-term outcomes depend more on underlying factors: demographic, economic, technological and above all political. Let us start with demography, because in some ways it is the most spectacularly obvious signal of what is happening.

By mid-century, China and India will between them account for about three billion people, a third of the currently expected nine billion people the world will by then need to sustain. Muslim societies, although divided among many sovereignties, will run to about two billion people. I acknowledge that in the past mere population numbers have not indicated much about either the diplomatic clout or the military capacity of the societies concerned. But that was then, this is now. What has happened in the interim is that non-Western societies, especially those of Asia, have acquired the technological, administrative and communication capacities necessary to maintain effective sovereign states with, in many cases, potentially formidable military capabilities. Along with that change has gone a perfervid growth, in many cases, of nationalist consensus, although in Muslim societies nationalist loyalties

seem to have been undercut in some cases by a competitive attachment to the larger concept of the Islamic *umma* (community of believers), and its political expression in the Caliphate.

Many societies, again especially in Asia, have also learned the secret of rapid economic growth, and the globalising world has become their oyster. China's economic rate has averaged over 10% in some decades. India's rate has been slower and began almost 15 years later, so it has been less widely noticed until very recently, but in some ways its future prospects for a steady 8% seem rosier. Its demographic profile is more conducive to future economic growth.

Those two vast sovereignties offer together a sort of lesson in the relations between political structure and economic growth. India has managed a respectable level of democracy ever since 1947, despite its many problems. China has of course been a communist autocracy ever since Mao Zedong came to power in 1949; although, since his death in 1976, one might describe the society as a capitalist economy run by a group of officially communist oligarchs. It is hard to resist the conclusion that, in the short term, autocracy can be more favourable to rapid economic growth than democracy. That lesson is reinforced by the cases of Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore. All had periods of rapid economic growth under authoritarian leaders, before developing more democratic systems.

What seems to have proved the underlying economic factor is that, given the other changes sketched above, the very large populations of China and India, which in the past have seemed to make inevitable the persistence of grinding poverty on tiny peasant farms for almost all their peoples, have instead provided, in the contemporary globalised world economy, an almost indefinite supply of low-wage labour. This has enabled China to become 'manufacturer to the world'. And in India's case, low-wage *educated* English-speaking labour has enabled it to become the 'back office' of the world. Of course we are bound to ask ourselves how long these conditions can last. A major war, a depression, or even a really serious recession might halt the process of globalisation, although perhaps not as long as happened in 1914. So the intellectual energies of the policy-makers of the powers need to be concentrated on

avoiding those catastrophes, as well as the ones apparently impending from the natural world.

Although the examples of India and China will remain the great symbols of the underlying changes in the society of states, they are not the only societies which have been putting on demographic and economic muscle. According to the UN's demographers, by mid-century there will be about 20 societies of more than 100 million people in the world: a quite substantial company of giants. Most of them, to raise their peoples above grinding poverty, will need to grow their economies at or above 7% per annum. In addition to China and India, by 2050 six other Asian societies will be among that group: Pakistan (305m), Indonesia (285m), Bangladesh (243m), the Philippines (127m), Vietnam (117m), and Japan (110m). Four are African: Nigeria (258m), Congo (177m), Ethiopia (170m), and Uganda (127m). Three are Middle Eastern: Egypt (126m), Iran (102m), and Turkey (101m). Latin America will have two: Brazil (253m) and Mexico (139m).²

Only one is European: Russia at 112m. But Russia, along with Japan and most of the European powers, will be declining in population. Its death rate is high, especially for men, and its birth rate has been very low, although it is now recovering somewhat. The United States will retain comparatively robust growth, to 395m by mid-century, and the European Union as a whole may run to 600m or more, depending on the rate of entry of new small sovereignties, mostly in Eastern Europe. If the focus is on ethnicity rather than nationality, the global change is equally striking. The Western strand of world population will shrink to 13% (and falling). Even the United States will be much less Western than at present. The higher rate of growth of Latino, Asian and African-descended strands of the population will mean that the European-descended strand will be reduced to 51%. World population is expected to 'plateau' before the end of the century, and then begin to decline, in some countries quite rapidly. So the problem of pressure of population on resources is mostly for this century: the decision-makers of the 22nd century may be more worried by declining peoples.

The prospective population disparities between the West and the non-West will not be anything new. According to the demographers, Asian

THE END OF THE VASCO DA GAMA ERA:
THE NEXT LANDSCAPE OF WORLD POLITICS

societies were probably much larger than European ones in the past, as they are likely to be again in the future. And the economic historians tell us that China and India were probably the largest economies in the world as late as 1840. The firm Goldman Sachs says they may be so again as early as 2040. So it is more a case of 'forward to the past' than 'brave new world', although the engagement now of China and India with the rest of the world makes a profound difference for the future.

The prospective structure of world politics

The society of states has never been a democracy. Usually it has been an oligarchy: the rule of a few. The difference between the prospective structure of 21st century world politics and the situations we became accustomed to in the 20th century is that those 'few' are going to be somewhat more numerous than those of the past, and considerably larger, in most cases. A landscape with giants: six obvious great powers (the United States, the European Union, China, India, Russia and Japan), but also several formidable emerging powers that are important enough, strategically or economically, to affect the relationships among the great powers. I would expect that latter group to include Pakistan, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico, Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and maybe Vietnam, South Africa, and Korea. So there may be as many as 15 or so major players in the future dramas of world politics. But smaller, lesser powers like Australia and Canada, with close connections to one or more of the great powers, may play special, useful roles; and so, unfortunately, may others which have a crucial role in particular crises, as Serbia did in the great disastrous crisis of 1914.

I use that comparison deliberately, because I think the nearest approximation to the prospective society of states is that of the 19th and early 20th century, 1815–1914. Then there were five great powers, as

THE END OF THE VASCO DA GAMA ERA:
THE NEXT LANDSCAPE OF WORLD POLITICS

against the prospective six, but also two emerging great powers —the United States and Japan — which, like China and India today, seemed destined to outdo the group they were joining. Then also there was a revolutionary force loose in the world: ardent militant nationalism then; violent militant Islamism now. Then the epicentre of conflict was the Balkans; now it is the Middle East. The future of the decaying Ottoman Empire, whose current incarnation is the Arab world, rather than Turkey, furrowed the brows of policy-makers then, just as it does now. Then also the world seemed on the crest of a wave of globalisation which seemed likely to change every society, for better or worse.

Balance and (hopefully) concert?

If historical precedent is any guide, so large and potent a group of powers as those that are in prospect is likely to pattern itself as a balance of power. Its decision-makers may also, however, use that balance of power as the basis for a viable concert of powers. That happened in 1815, after the Napoleonic Wars, and the system devised by the foreign policy decision-makers of that time managed to avoid hegemonial war (war between the great powers to determine their rank order) for the next 99 years, until the crisis management of 1914 failed. That final disaster led to an assumption (made almost universal by the eloquence of then US President Woodrow Wilson) that the whole system, and the diplomatic tradition on which it had been based, must be replaced by something new: ‘a community of power, rather than a balance of power’, as he said. So his League of Nations was born, only to be repudiated by the US Senate and, in time, the electorate.

A community of power proved as difficult to create as the ‘instant democracy’ in the Middle East that the neo-Wilsonians of President George W Bush’s administration tried to bring into being by the invasion of Iraq in 2003. I will return to that point later, but in the meantime would make the point that the League of Nations so hopefully entered into by many idealists (including some notable Australians) lasted barely

THE END OF THE VASCO DA GAMA ERA:
THE NEXT LANDSCAPE OF WORLD POLITICS

20 years (as against the Concert of Power's 99 years), was ineffective most of that time and ended in the most disastrous hegemonial war in history. Its successor, the United Nations, has lasted much longer, (more than 60 years now) but co-existed with a hegemonial war (the Cold War) for 43 years of that time, without being able to attain any role in its management, or its ending. In effect, an old-fashioned balance of power alliance (NATO) put together by the United States and Britain in 1948–49 (using diplomatic and military strategies devised as early as 1946) eventually persuaded the Soviet Union's then decision-makers to call the Cold War off. (Their Russian successors still claim that the motive for withdrawal from the contest was not defeat by the West, but their own internal evolution which had rejected the totalitarian system of the Soviet Union).³

Whether or not that is the case, one might say that, ever since 1949, the United Nations has provided a formal Wilsonian façade to a system actually based on a more traditional balance of power coalition. Given the current redistribution of power in the world, it seems likely that the United Nations could continue to co-exist with (and even be made more effective by) a wider concert of powers. In time there ought to be an expansion of the membership of the Security Council to reflect the 21st century distribution of power instead of that of 1945 (as is the case at present), but otherwise its workings would not change much. Past experience of efforts to reform the UN Security Council seems to mean that the veto-endowed powers of 1945 are not yet ready to share that privilege with newcomers, or relinquish it. But that does not prevent the actual great powers of this decade getting together in other forums, as in fact they constantly do, and (short of some really disastrous crisis) will continue to do. That point will be elaborated later.

To my mind, the current and immediately pending world context is surprisingly congenial to the building of the sort of diplomatic consensus between the great powers that marked the old Concert of Powers. Primarily that is because the major threats faced by all six of them arise from outside their own circle. They are threats in common, and there is no better diplomatic glue than a formidable threat in common. Moreover, there are now three such threats: first the jihadists;

BALANCE AND (HOPEFULLY) CONCERT?

second, climate change; and third, the proliferation of nuclear weapons to minor powers. All of the great powers have something to fear from the jihadists, all of them have something to fear from climate change, and none of them wants new members in their exclusive nuclear weapons club. Importantly also, none of them is, in the 1930s sense, a 'have-not' power, as Germany, Italy and Japan claimed to be then. All of them except Japan have large territories and ample resources, and Japan has neither a need nor inclination to embark on the sorts of policies followed by its governments in 1931–41. Besides, the power constellation of its region has totally changed, so it could not do so, even with nuclear weapons.

It should not be assumed that the success of the old Concert in avoiding hegemonial war for 99 years was due to some benign absence of tensions between the five great powers of that period. On the contrary, such tensions were greater than they are now between the six contemporary great powers. There was a ferocious imperial rivalry between Britain and Russia ('the Great Game') in Central Asia right up to the treaty of 1907. There was an equal imperial rivalry between Britain and France in Africa right up to the *Entente Cordiale* in 1904. They almost came to war as late as 1898 over the Fashoda Crisis. There were two actual great-power wars (Crimean and Franco-Prussian), either of which might have turned into a hegemonial war if it had not been for prudent diplomacy. Two major nations, Italy and Imperial Germany, were put together in the period with only one short (although very important) war, and some skirmishes, despite the many frictions those processes engendered.

An old imperial power, the Ottoman Empire, was slowly stripped of its European territories, starting with Greece in 1832 and ending with Bosnia in 1908, again without major war, despite the diplomatic frictions. There were also another set of potentially war-bearing tensions which are so forgotten now that they seem almost unbelievable, but were very real at the time: between Britain and the United States. Even after 1812, the two came close to hostilities on several occasions, mostly over remaining British colonies in the Americas. The Venezuela crisis of 1895, for instance, evoked quite a lot of war talk in the United States,

and the US Navy's contingency plans included war with Britain as late as the 1920s. So, by comparison with the 19th century, the current early 21st century great-power relationships constitute at the moment a sort of multilateral détente.

Moreover, the social conditions and political doctrines of that time were at least as disturbing as those in prospect. Europe's populations and economies grew almost as fast as those we used to call the Third World are growing now. Two well-known radicals called Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were propounding (in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, the 'year of revolutions') ideas far more revolutionary than any now popular. The anarchists were then causing as much alarm as the terrorists of today. Societies were being transformed by industrialisation and education, just as at present, only in a different part of the world.

So the most crucial element of difference between the two patches of history may be the geography involved. Where once the focus of crises was Europe (especially in the Balkans), now it is in the non-European world as a whole (but especially in the Middle East at present). Once things are a little less catastrophic there, the focus of tension seems almost certain to shift to Asia. The quintet of powers in Northeast Asia (China, Japan, the United States, Russia, and either South Korea or the reunited version, which would make a considerable power) embodies plenty of potential for friction. The resentment that China feels about the past depredations of Japan is real and serious. North Korea remains an unpredictable 'wild card'. Above all, Washington's most crucial and difficult areas of adjustment will relate to Northeast Asia. But, in the current context, we have to think of Asia as a whole as the theatre of international politics, rather than in its traditional sections. That is, since China and India are close neighbours, and each is interested in Southeast Asia and Central Asia, the tensions between and within the smaller powers of those regions (like Taiwan or North and South Korea) may affect the relations between the great powers, to disastrous effect.

That seems to me to provide yet another reason for the great powers to try to insulate their relations with each other against crises between the other members of the society of states, and even more from the machinations of 'non-state actors'. The crisis of 1914 provides ample

warning of how events can flame disastrously out of control. The spark that lit the tinder came from a non-state actor. It burned on through a dispute between a small power, Serbia, and a decaying imperial power, Austria, until it became a raging fire that reduced the entire European society of states of that time to ashes, and produced a new world — Adolf Hitler's world — that was vastly worse than the one it replaced. The genesis of that disaster remains a lesson in the necessity for the great powers to cultivate a wary alertness to the law of unintended consequences.

Luckily, there is already a relatively well-trodden way for them to cultivate the kind of diplomatic consensus that would nourish such wariness. It is the ongoing process which began in 1975 as the Group of Four (the United States, United Kingdom, Germany and France), rapidly became the G7, and then the G8 (when Russia emerged from the ruins of the Soviet Union). Tony Blair has already reportedly suggested that it become the G13, with the recruitment of China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa. Those five attended the 2007 meeting of the G8 in Germany, and if they became full members, the result would be an approximation to a Concert of Powers for the 21st century. A larger group, including Australia, operates as the G20, in economic matters, and is attended by treasurers of the major powers. If its focus were widened, it might become a balancing second echelon of power, and Australia's role might parallel that of Canada. A sort of further potential counterforce might be provided by what is still called the G77, although it now runs to many more members, among countries which are mostly unlikely to make it to the ranks of the great powers. However, as a group they can nevertheless exert some influence on the world, especially through regional organisations.

Flexible and growth-oriented associations, of an informal sort, are the most hopeful sign of understanding by current decision-makers of how to advance or protect their respective national interests while reducing the risk of military conflict. If we look at the great powers individually, we can see why quite powerful inducements exist for each of them to continue along this pathway.

China

For Beijing, the basic drive of present policy, as defined in 2007 by President Hu Jintao, is to continue building its economic capacity and the prosperity of its still mostly impoverished peoples. He said in February 2007 that this task must be the nation's first priority for the next 100 years. That forecast may be taken with a grain or two of salt, but 30 years does seem quite probable. Although the three decades of growth since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 have been vastly impressive, they have not by any means as yet undone the disasters of the decades before that time — the 'Great Leap Forward' and the 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution'.

China is now of economic importance to the whole world, in a way that the Soviet Union never succeeded in being during the days of its rivalry with the United States. Its middle class is growing fast and prospering, but the distribution of income (especially between the coastal cities and the rural interior) is profoundly uneven, the regime's intolerance of any form of dissent is formidable, and there are vast economic problems of non-performing debt, and inefficient state industries. So one should not assume an unbroken path upwards for either the economy or the society as a whole.

China's strategic capacities are growing fast, like the economy, but are as yet nowhere near being in the same league as those of the United States, as the Chinese 'top brass' well know. Its power-projection capacity is as yet local. The present leaders of the country seem to be concentrating on conducting a resourceful (and very resource-conscious) diplomatic push in Africa and Latin America — a push that is far more successful than that used by the Soviet Union when it was wooing the Third World. Far more successful also, one would say, than that of the United States in the George W Bush administrations.

The realism Chinese diplomats demonstrate in those endeavours may hopefully be construed as a signal that they also have an equally realistic appreciation that all their fellow great powers are keenly conscious that this new member of their exclusive club is becoming a very potent force in the world. If Beijing showed any sign of ambitions toward hegemonial status, even just in Central Asia or Southeast Asia,

it would in my view rapidly face a very powerful anti-hegemonial alliance against it: the United States, Japan, India and Russia would all be quite conscious of what might be at stake for them. Russia especially, because Moscow has a great deal to lose in the Russian Far East and Central Asia if China should make a bid to be the hegemonial power in that vast region. Mao Zedong, when he was quarrelling with the Soviet Union during the 1970s, used to talk ominously about the 'unequal treaties' of the 19th century, by which the old Czarist Empire acquired a lot of what he felt should have been part of the old Chinese Empire. The subject has not come up lately, but that is not to say it could never be revived.⁴

India

India seems likely to have an easier path than China vis-à-vis the other great powers. As an enormous and by now well-established democracy, it has far fewer prospective clashes of political and human-rights norms with the West. Even more importantly, it has no real clash of strategic interest with any of the great powers except China. The United States is and will remain a Pacific power, but has actually always been rather reluctant to interest itself in the Indian Ocean area. The US Navy has argued that it already has quite enough on its plate with the Pacific, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Gulf, so an ally — a potential major naval power — in that part of the world would be very welcome. And India is the only eligible candidate. Australia has an efficient modern naval capacity, but it is always going to be quite small, and it is a rather long way from the most probable areas of crisis. There is the base on Diego Garcia, on territory leased from Britain, but as long as the Gulf is a focus of crises, the demands on it are going to be heavy.

World interest in the Gulf States must increase as the demand for oil from both India and China, as well as many other countries, increases, and there is no halt to that tendency as yet. India itself gets about 70% of its supply from the Gulf and that figure may rise to 90% of an increasing total in the near future. The United States has more diverse sources, but it is also heavily Gulf-dependent, and indeed one might say Gulf-fixated. So there is a rather powerful common interest for the

moment between the two. And there is also a common preoccupation with the rise and rise of Chinese power, although that might be blandly denied by official spokespeople on both sides.

It is not surprising that India should regard the Indian Ocean as its own backyard, and recent developments have made it almost inevitable that China should be regarded as its only likely competitor in that region. China is apparently aspiring to a potent and relatively invulnerable second strike nuclear capacity, SLBM-based, although not yet much developed. It is also interested in the Gulf as a source of oil and the central theatre at the moment of world crises. It has been helping Pakistan to develop a major port at Gwadar, almost on the edge of the Strait of Hormuz, the natural choke-point for tankers if 'push should come to shove' over Iran. Moreover, China is seen as encroaching somewhat on India's sphere of primary strategic interest in the Bay of Bengal, with the alleged development of SIGINT on an island there (leased from Burma), not far from India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands. India has some security installations on those islands which are so sensitive that when a tsunami struck the area, even humanitarian-aid workers from the outside world were denied entry, although the local community was said to be devastated. China's close ties with both Pakistan and Burma are inevitably going to be eyed askance in India.⁵

Since the 2006 agreement with Bush, India may be able to buy very advanced aircraft from the United States (maybe F-16s and F-18s, which will irk Pakistan) but its naval procurement program is still heavily dependent on Russia. The relationship is longstanding, since Soviet days. India intends to acquire another aircraft carrier (and the MiG aircraft to go with it), as well as more frigates, along with French submarines and Exocet missiles: altogether one would have to say an ambitious build-up. It may need uranium from Australia for power generators, although probably not for weaponry, which would present problems for Canberra, whoever is in office. So the Indian Ocean seems likely to become an arena of complex naval rivalries, if the world's dependence on Gulf oil continues to grow.⁶

Japan

Japan is obviously the most vulnerable of the powers to the rise and rise of China, and there have been many signals that its political élite is very conscious of that point, and is quietly reinforcing its diplomatic and strategic positions to meet the prospective circumstances. There is a good deal of historical irony in fact that the growth of a powerful Asian neighbour has diminished Japan's sense of security, for it was Japan which issued the first Asian challenge to the European powers by its defeat of the Russians in the war of 1904–1905. In effect, one could view that victory as the first wave of the tsunami of change, which is now at full flood with the rise of China and India.

In the strategic field, the end of the Cold War was taken by some commentators to mean that the US alliance with Japan was no longer relevant: that Japan no longer needed US protection. To the contrary, of course, China's new strategic capacities, and even North Korea's test of its nuclear and missile capabilities, have made it far more crucial and have made almost certain a more active Japanese effort to keep the connection viable, at least for the foreseeable future.

The shape of policies during the brief 2006-07 tenure of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe seemed to provoke anxieties. He was less adroit on diplomatic issues than his seemingly cosmopolitan predecessor, Junichiro Koizumi, and looked more like a traditional Japanese nationalist. That may have stemmed in part from his refusal so far to apologise adequately to the 'comfort women', and the fact that his grandfather (to whom he is said to have been devoted) was a member of Hideki Tojo's war cabinet who was jailed as a war criminal following Japan's defeat in the Second World War. That sort of family history is likely to leave the next generation or two with grudges. On the other hand, he did not visit the Yakusuni Shrine, and made early overtures to China, and his successor will likely maintain that course.

Whether public opinion in Japan might become so alarmed at the rising power of China as to arouse demand for repeal of Article 9 of the Constitution, and conversion of the Self Defense Forces into normal great-power armed forces, is as yet uncertain. That would not necessarily mean a nuclear deterrent for Japan. There are other

signals that could be sent. The acquisition of an aircraft carrier, long-range bombers, air-refuelling capacity, heavy-lift aircraft, more elaborate command and control capacity and such would all indicate a significant shift of military stance. Japan is already committed to participation in the US missile defence system, and is tentatively venturing, in a small way, on to some battlefields, as in Iraq, although not as yet in a combat role.⁷

Russia

In an odd way, what happened to the Soviet Union during the 1990s looks like a prophetic omen of what was to happen, in the first decade of the 21st century, to the United States. In the military hubris of superpower days in the Soviet Union, the decision-makers in Moscow in 1979 took a rash determination to effect 'regime change' in Afghanistan. They should have remembered the history of the country. By 1988, Moscow had to shrug its shoulders and walk away from that zone of disaster, because its domestic political system was by then on the eve of transformation, and it was also abdicating from the Cold War struggle with the West, reverting from superpower to great power. Even some of the smaller sovereignties of the old dysfunctional Soviet system (Georgia, for instance) have now the capacity to cause the new Russian decision-makers a great deal of aggravation.

Nevertheless, 16 years on, Russia is newly formidable as a great power, demanding its place in the sun, and in my view potentially having more options than any of the other five. That is because it can offer each of them something the government concerned may regard as advantageous, or even (in a major crisis) vital, to its national interests. To Beijing, if China should appear likely to be forced into a confrontation with the United States, it could offer more or less the recreation of the bipolar world. A really convincing military alliance between Moscow and Beijing would produce that almost overnight, and the Chinese have been wistfully talking in Moscow for years about 'strategic partnership'. But I do not regard such a deal as probable: Moscow has very strong reasons for avoiding any crisis that looks as if it might carry the risk of war with the United States.

To India, alternatively, it could promise unconditional support against China, including all the most useful weaponry, either for the long-term build-up of its strategic (especially naval) potential, or more immediate diplomatic and military aid if a sudden crisis similar to that of 1962 should arise. But again I do not regard that kind of deal as probable, since it offers no benefit to the Russian national interest, unless China looked like making a bid to become the hegemonial power in the Central Asian region. In that case, all bets would be off.

Even to Japan, Russia has something to offer: a resolution of the dispute over what the Japanese call their 'Northern Territories', and favourable access to the oil and gas from Sakhalin. Indeed that new-found or newly-developed capacity to export oil and gas at high prices from its not yet fully explored resources gives Moscow a diplomatic and economic weapon that it never enjoyed in Soviet days. Russia is vying with Saudi Arabia to be the world's largest oil producer and exporter. Its gas reserves are reported to be the largest in the world. It has a group of eager buyers — the Europeans — on its doorstep that are accessible by pipeline and, in time and with investment, it could develop a liquefied natural gas industry to supply more distant markets.

Moreover, the new Russia still retains, from its old Soviet days, a nuclear arsenal which is capable of a devastating strike on US targets, although of course only at the cost of even greater potential devastation in its own society. Short of some truly catastrophic miscalculation on the part of some decision-maker in Moscow or Washington, that also seems improbable, but the previously ill-kept submarine fleet is apparently being revived with new models, and Vladimir Putin is said to be engaged in reforming the armed forces. He is certainly engaged in muscle-flexing operations like the re-deployment of strategic bomber patrols.

In the early days of the old Concert of Powers, the Czar was the most zealous upholder of its virtues. The British Foreign Secretary of the time used to dismiss that enthusiasm as the Czar's 'sublime mysticism and nonsense'. Even in the expiring days of the Concert of Powers, before the First World War, the then Czar was trying to revive the Concert in the interest of controlling the then arms race. The new Czars of the

emerging system could well find it useful again to the Russian national interest. Putin, despite his KGB past, clearly belongs with the Czars rather than the Commissars. His objective is to restore Russia as a great power carrying what he regards as its due weight in world politics, not to carry out any revolutionary mission.

Putin's speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in early 2007 was artfully crafted to articulate the misgivings of many Europeans at the tenor of US policy in the George W Bush years, and at the structure of world politics: 'What is a unipolar world? At the end of the day, one center of authority, one center of force, one center of decision-making ... one master, one sovereign. And this certainly has nothing to do with democracy'. A number of the other policy-makers present must have said a silent 'hear hear'. The prospect of a world of six great powers, with reasonably equal influence on the way history evolves, is far more consonant with the historic Russian vision of the way the world should work than the traditional US views of its own role in the world, which have tended to alternate between 'manifest destiny' and 'splendid isolation'.⁸

Europe

For the Europeans, the evolution of the present system of diplomatic consultations towards its recognition as a concert of powers would be the dream scenario; their own old solution to the problem of a multipolar world writ global. But there is at present no single EU foreign policy, so one must consider the different policies of London, Paris and Berlin, and also those of smaller powers with what may prove a blocking vote on some matter they may regard as vital. Poland, for instance, or even Cyprus: the first has particular concerns vis-à-vis Russia, and the second vis-à-vis Turkey. London, Paris and Berlin will probably call the shots in time, but the European Union (especially on voting rights) is so organised that it is going to take a great deal of effort by the great powers, in conjunction, to achieve anything.

As far as London is concerned, it seems unlikely that either Gordon Brown as UK prime minister or David Cameron as a possible future prime minister would be likely to deviate much from the assumption

that dominated Tony Blair's 10 years in office; that the Atlantic Alliance was the most important of Britain's diplomatic and strategic connections, easily outweighing those with France and Germany. As in Canberra, that conviction dates back to the dark days of 1941-42, when for London most of the Continent, and for Canberra most of Asia, lay under the heel of a conqueror — Germany in Europe, Japan in the Pacific. The decision for the United Kingdom to go into Iraq alongside the United States cost Blair politically far more than it cost Australia's John Howard, but in neither case was it particularly surprising. A strategic assumption established for 60 years will stand up to a lot of qualms about the particular decision involved.

Britain is not likely in the foreseeable future to favour any kind of federal or 'supranational' future for Europe, just an economic confederation of separate and autonomous political and cultural identities. Member states should also, of course, have the capacity to act as a cohesive military alliance in a crisis. But there is already in British eyes an approximation to that in NATO, and London has thus far been resolutely opposed to the kind of project sometimes formulated in Paris or Brussels which would see Europe as a potential military rival to the United States or at least (as the French say) a 'puissance' quite independent of Washington.

In 2007 that ambition seemed far less likely to be cherished or even contemplated in the Europe of Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel than it was in the Europe of Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schröder. With the end of the Iraq adventure at least in view, likewise the end of the unipolar world (which was much resented in Paris), and with Washington reverting to multilateral diplomacy, the prospects for a new era of Atlanticism seem very promising, especially since Sarkozy, despite being a Gaullist, appears more friendly to the United States than any recent French president.

Europe is still a work in progress: still needing to expand to its geographical definition, which would mean over 30 member states; still needing to resolve its relationships with Russia and Turkey. To my mind the case for the admission of Turkey is more or less lost already especially since Sarkozy is vehemently opposed. Europeans have never regarded the Turks

as fellow Europeans: after all, Islamic power, whatever its embodiment in sovereign states, had been the most formidable threat to Europe for almost 1,000 years, from the 8th century (the Battle of Tours in 732 AD) to the end of the 17th century (when the Ottomans were turned back from the gates of Vienna). Nowadays, Europeans are conscious also that there is a vast Muslim diaspora within the European Union, which is under suspicion of being a Trojan horse. If Turkey were admitted, not only would it be the largest of the 'European' states (at over 100 million by mid-century), its citizens would be entitled to join the existing diaspora in large numbers. Nothing would be less likely to appeal to Europe's voters. Europe is not just an economic club, it is a cultural, historical and geographical identity and the Hellespont has been assumed to be one of its borders.

On the other hand, Russia has been assumed to be part of Europe since the 17th century. It has been Christian for more than 1,000 years. Many of the stars of European culture have been Russians. Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov are equal points of European pride with William Shakespeare and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Since the loss of territory when the Soviet Union collapsed, the Russian people are now ethnically European for the most part, although with a large Muslim minority. The population is declining, and its prosperity is rising, so the prospect of a major increase in the existing Russian diaspora in Western Europe and the United States is less daunting.

Russia's political relations with the European Union are at the moment in a bad way, but that is not necessarily a permanent condition. As with the United States, much will depend on the outcome of the 2008 elections. If Europe ever really opted to seek strategic equality with the United States, the way to achieve it, most rapidly and at least cost, would be a close military alliance with Russia. But that would only be a possibility if the Atlantic alliance was irretrievably gone and the next Russian government was less authoritarian. Nevertheless, the Russian economy is growing quite rapidly, the educated class is large and expanding and, despite a long history of the absence of democracy, the social conditions that should allow future movement towards it look reasonably promising. So time may well solve the problems of relations between the European Union and Russia.

The United States

The United States, of course, will remain the most important single factor in international diplomacy, and is as yet one of the primary uncertainties of an uncertain world. Much will depend on who is in the White House in 2009, and what advisers that President installs as Secretary of State, National Security Adviser and Secretary of Defense. But the matter goes deeper than the choice of individuals, to the question of which strand of the several US foreign policy traditions is uppermost, not only in the Administration but in Congress and the public mood as well. The eight years of George W Bush's decision-making seemed, until 2006, to be mostly dominated by what its chief historian calls the Jacksonian tradition in foreign policy. It is named after Andrew Jackson ('Old Hickory'), the victor of the Battle of New Orleans and later US president, and is marked by a spirit of assertive US nationalism in operational policy. In Bush's time it has been clothed in unconvincing neo-Wilsonian rhetoric, and has absorbed some Wilsonian objectives, which have made it even more disturbing to many outsiders.

In disastrous combination with a sort of national post-traumatic stress syndrome following the terrorists attacks of 11 September 2001, it produced policies that included the invasion of Iraq, dislike and resentment of the United Nations, protectionism in trade policy, suspicion of globalisation, tendency to disparage many allies (as in Donald Rumsfeld's initial downplaying of the usefulness of NATO forces in Afghanistan) and refusal to ratify the Kyoto undertakings. As its historian dryly observes, this tradition tends to be 'embraced by people who know little of the outside world'.⁹ (Maybe he was thinking of his President?) It stresses concepts like 'no substitute for victory', equating victory with 'unconditional surrender', and stressing US 'exceptionalism': America has nothing to learn from other countries, it has a unique mandate from God.

Luckily that is not the only US foreign policy tradition. Since the verdict of the 2006 Congressional elections, clearly adverse to the continuance of the war in Iraq, the pragmatists and the realists have resumed their normal influence in Washington,¹⁰ including some whose

minds seem to have turned not only to balances of power (both central and regional), but even to the possibilities of a concert of powers.

It should not be assumed that the advent of one of the Democratic contenders to the White House will necessarily solve all the problems which have blighted the Bush years. I have described the Bush operational policies as Jacksonian, but as Henry Kissinger once said, ever since Woodrow Wilson's time as President, all US foreign policy initiatives have had to be described as 'crusades' (although the use of that actual word has now to be avoided, as Bush was somewhat belatedly told). So Democratic contenders, just like the President, speak in terms of neo-Wilsonian moral ambition. For instance, Barack Obama, talking to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs in 2007, said that the United States must build up other nations with 'a strong legislature, an independent judiciary, the rule of law, a vibrant civil society, a free press and an honest police force ... it must seize "the American moment" and "begin the world anew"'. Quite an ambition, but he has not said that he would accomplish all those noble objectives by sending in the troops, and has promised to take those in Iraq out in short order.¹¹

Iraq has been no end of a lesson, and not only for Democrats. The penalties for failure have been sharp. Bush himself seems in his final months like the captain left standing on the sinking ship, 'whence all but he have fled'. His chief and most articulate ally, the United Kingdom's Tony Blair, has left office. Back home, Rumsfeld has left, replaced by Robert Gates; and Dick Cheney is under a cloud, especially since his chief aide, Lewis Libby, was sentenced to jail for activities the vice president was alleged to have authorised. Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith and John Bolton are out. The electorate's approval rating for the Iraq war, which stood at 72% at the fall of Baghdad, was down to 24% in May 2007. Even the 10 Republican candidates of mid-2007 seemed hardly to have a good word between them for Bush's policies, most especially on Iraq. When they cited an inspiring predecessor, it was always Ronald Reagan.

It is a desolating comment on the level of moral ambition which was the theme of Bush's second inaugural address: 'to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation

and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. ... All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know: the United States will not ignore your oppression, or excuse your oppressors'.¹² Fine sentiments, but the reason they ended in the disaster of Iraq was the decision to achieve them by exporting US-style democracy on tanks to Baghdad, in the hope that it would be the 'first domino' whose fall would knock over other regimes in the Arab world.

Iraq was certainly not the initial reason for Islamic (especially Arab) rage and resentment against Washington. For Osama bin Laden himself, that may well have begun with Franklin Delano Roosevelt's deal with the Saudi royal house, over oil, back at the end of the Second World War. That regime has long been one of the major targets of the jihadists, because of the importance of Arabia as the sacred soil of the Prophet's homeland, and their assumption that the Saudi élite do not practise or embody proper Islamic norms. It was no accident that 15 of the 19 perpetrators of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States were Saudis. The longest and closest US association with an Arab state had generated the most resentment. If there had been any substance to the claim that war with an Arab regime (not just the campaign in Afghanistan) was needed to extirpate the roots of jihadism, in financial and political connections, as well as in doctrine (Wahhabism), the logical target was there, not Iraq. So why was Iraq chosen?

Until all the memoirs are published, we will not know for certain, and perhaps not even then. But at the moment one can say that, at the time, it looked like the 'most available' target. In the Gulf War of 1991, Saddam Hussein's forces had been defeated quickly and at reasonably low cost in US casualties and diplomatic troubles. There was a genuine belief, among many intelligence agencies, that Saddam still had some weapons of mass destruction and might be building more. He was not popular, even with other Arab regimes. Many of the neo-conservatives in the United States had resented the decision of George H W Bush to stop at the Kuwaiti border, and not attempt to depose Saddam or to occupy Iraq. On the very morning following the attacks of 11 September 2001, Perle and Wolfowitz were reportedly telling other policy-makers, in effect, 'now we can go after Iraq', although there were no Iraqis

among the perpetrators, and no evidence that Saddam Hussein had anything to do with its planning. Nor was that ever likely: his regime by Arab standards had been relatively secular, as well as very corrupt and brutal. He was indeed one of the primary targets for removal for not only the neo-conservatives in Washington but the dedicated jihadists of the Arab world.

Saddam Hussein was equally a thorn in the flesh of the Ayatollahs in Iran, not only because he relied on his Sunni clan and his troops to keep in check the majority Shia population of Iraq (about 60% of the population, the rest being about 20% each for Kurds and Sunni, along with some minor ethnic or religious minorities), but also of course because he had waged a murderous war against Iran (with considerable US backing) for eight years. So, in effect, the US invasion and Saddam Hussein's subsequent trial and execution constituted favours not only for the Shia and Kurds in Iraq, but for the Iranian regime, which is a far more dangerous enemy to Washington than Saddam could ever have been. Some of the Iraq exiles whose forecasts of easy victory were too readily swallowed by policy-makers in the Pentagon were suspiciously close to Iran: perhaps they were pushing more than an Iraqi barrel.

Before the invasion, the policy had been 'dual containment': that is, using Iraq and Iran to balance each other. The invasion of course ended that policy, although it had been more effective than the 'war party' of the time in Washington conceded, and has not as yet been replaced with anything equally effective and sustainable. Despite Bush's assiduity in insisting in calling Iraq an essential part of his 'global war on terror', to Arab eyes it looked more like just another chapter in what they see as a Western war on Islam, which for them began 90 years ago, with the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

Along the way, they would count Harry S Truman's instant recognition of Israel in 1948, the successive Arab-Israeli wars since (especially the Six-Day War in June 1967), the collusion of Britain and France with Israel in the Suez crisis of 1956, and the British and US incursions into Jordan and Lebanon in 1958. For the Saudi radicals, like Osama bin Laden, everything from the original agreement between Roosevelt and the dynasty over oil to the presence of US service personnel in the

land of the Prophet after the Gulf War of 1991 was a grievance. For Iran, it was especially the US-engineered coup that deposed a rather moderate nationalist, Mohammad Mossadegh, in 1953, and placed the young Shah back on the throne. The 1979 coup and subsequent hostage crisis were the Ayatollahs' payback for that. Since then, there has been an almost total refusal of even diplomatic contact by the United States with Iran, until the possible beginning of a thaw with talks between ambassadors in 2007.

But to turn from that disaster to a much more successful arena of American foreign policy in the Bush years, the shock of the 11 September 2001 attacks had a vastly more constructive impact on US relations with China. Earlier in 2001 it had occasionally looked as if Washington and Beijing might be on a collision course, especially over Taiwan. The rise and rise of Chinese power had certainly been front and centre of the Pentagon's perception of possible 'peer-competitors' on the horizon, ever since the default of the Soviet Union from its Cold War role as 'adversary-elect'. But the necessity for bases in Central Asia for the campaign in Afghanistan meant better relations with both China and Russia also became vital, and the response from both capitals was, at the time, enthusiastic. They might almost have been subscribing to the French sentiment of the time 'we are all Americans now'.

Despite a few glitches, relations with China remain better than they were before 11 September 2001. Even more importantly, Washington has appeared to be accommodating itself fairly readily to the sight of a China putting on muscle very fast, not only economically but to a lesser extent strategically. It still has not much power-projection capacity, but in its own immediate vicinity, the Taiwan Strait, and the Korean peninsula, no one could doubt that it is emerging as the dominant power. Washington has also been quite openly reliant on China to cope with the problem of North Korea, since no other government is in much of a position to do anything effective, and the last thing the US electorate would want, while things are deteriorating in Iraq and Afghanistan, is a new military embroilment in East Asia.

The political élites in South Korea and Taiwan are naturally even more conscious of the rise and rise of Chinese power, both economically

THE END OF THE VASCO DA GAMA ERA:
THE NEXT LANDSCAPE OF WORLD POLITICS

and strategically, than those less close to its borders. What is more, they have seen in Iraq the costs to the 'battlefield society' of having one's democratic prospects defended by US military forces. The changes in US policy in the past two years, however, have made that prospect somewhat less probable.

US policy appears to have moved in tentative steps into, as it were, perhaps allowing China a 'strategic perimeter' of its own, encompassing not only Korea (North and South), but Taiwan. Admittedly, the indications of this change are small and vague, just straws in the wind, but they are seen also in the changes Taiwan and both Koreas have themselves made. Both now are intimately entwined with China in economic matters. About a million Taiwanese work on the mainland, many have married there, and many have invested there. The 'independent Taiwan' concept seems out of favour, certainly in Washington and perhaps for many in Taiwan itself. Its chief proponent, the current President Chen Shui-bian, has been firmly snubbed by Washington on several occasions, and the 'status quo' reaffirmed. South Korea likewise has been distancing itself from Washington on many issues vis-à-vis North Korea, and is no doubt fully conscious that, if there is ever to be reunification, China's acquiescence is vital. But, as I have conceded, these hints are just straws in the wind, and the wind can change.

Washington's attitudes to that part of the world may be interpreted as slowly but steadily reverting to the strategic stance of then US Secretary of States Dean Acheson's White Paper of 1949, which in effect disentangled US strategic commitments from the Northeast Asian mainland. That doctrine was superseded by Truman's 1950 decision to include both South Korea and Taiwan in the US area of commitment, but the consciousness of a 'China growing strong' have made that 1949 policy far more necessary that it was when originally developed. Nixon's 'Guam Doctrine' of 1969, as the war went sour in Vietnam, held an echo of it, and Guam is now being conspicuously strengthened, apparently for a future role as a replacement for closer bases.

Islam and the society of states

The most intractable and urgent tasks facing the society of states in the early 21st century arise from the need, and great difficulties, of repairing the damage inflicted on the relationship between the Islamic world and the rest of the society of states during the 20th century. By contrast, in the 19th century (most of the years of the old Concert of Powers), the relationship was somewhat less fraught with rage and resentment on either side. There were many reasons for this, but one was that Islamic power was then embodied in a sovereign state — the old Ottoman Empire — which was even officially recruited to the Concert of Powers in 1856, although the other five probably never really regarded it as a full member of the club. The cultural gap was too wide.

The history of that period induces consciousness of the advantages of having even a potential adversary embodied in a sovereign state. A sovereign state has a lot to lose. So it has much that can be held at risk by its potential adversaries: its cities; its economic interests; its infrastructure; and the lives of its citizens. The whole concept of deterrence rests on that fact. The jihadists, as 'non-state actors', have no such interests to be held at risk, not even the members' lives, since they hold, as an item of faith, that death in the cause is a passport to a glorious afterlife. They cannot, at the moment, even suggest potential

interlocutors, with whom some terms of co-existence could be discussed, since the West keeps on insisting it never negotiates with terrorists. Controversial as the idea may seem, however, some slight mitigation of the present level of hostilities might possibly be sought through the recreation of a kind of viable interlocutor. Obviously the Ottoman Empire cannot be recreated, but one institution associated with it might be: the Caliphate. It was abolished only in 1924, by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in his zeal for the secularisation of Turkey. But it was not in origin Turkish: the first Caliph, just after Muhammad died in 632, was the Prophet's father-in-law, acting as his 'successor' (Caliph). The Caliphate was once held by Egypt, although its glory days were probably when it was held in Baghdad. Bernard Lewis has written, speaking of the appeals of militant Islamism:

In a time of intensifying strains, of faltering ideologies, jaded loyalties and crumbling institutions, an ideology expressed in Islamic terms offered several advantages: an emotionally familiar basis of group identity, solidarity and exclusion; an acceptable basis of legitimacy and authority; an immediately intelligible formulation of principles for both a critique of the present and a program for the future.¹³

Unfortunately, those assets at present lie with the jihadists, but there seems just a faint chance that if one of the Arab states were to propose reviving the Caliphate, it might potentially prove of use in finding a diplomatic *modus vivendi* — or at least a path for seeking the peaceful co-existence of Islamic power with the rest of the society of states. The first objection to any such notion will certainly be that a return of the Caliphate is just what the jihadists want: Osama bin Laden himself has said so. But that does not necessarily mean that it could have no advantages for the West, if it were in moderate hands. The Caliphate is a religious and political symbol for the Islamic world. Conceding a symbol to the other side, if it helps progress towards the substance of a desired objective, is often a useful strategy. A possible instance of such

usefulness might be seen in the Helsinki Declaration of December 1975. At the time it was attacked in the United States as practically amounting to 'giving away the store' in Eastern Europe. But in substance, while providing the Russians with a symbol of détente, it actually gave the East Europeans some 'wiggle room' within the Warsaw Pact, which they used to good effect in the following few years. A decade on, in Mikhail Gorbachev's time, the Soviet grasp on Eastern Europe had loosened: not long after that the Berlin Wall was coming down and the Cold War was ending. If the prospect of restoration of the Caliphate forms part of the appeal that the jihadists use to recruit their followers, surely creating an alternative pathway to it, through more peaceful diplomatic means, might undercut at least one of their attractions?

What's past is prologue?

'Prologue' does not imply blind repetition: it merely implies the possibility of learning something from history. To argue, as I have been doing, that the experience of the European multipolar diplomatic past could hold some useful hints for the multipolar global future is nevertheless inevitably controversial. The colonialist segment of that European past largely ran parallel with the Concert of Powers period, and not by accident. That very reasonably makes it an object of suspicion, not only in the United States but in much of the emerging world. So it is vital to look at the question of how the interests of the less powerful could be safeguarded in a system dominated by great powers and potential emerging powers. There will be some 200 members of the society of states this century, maybe a few more, but only 15 or so are likely to make it to the ranks of the great and emergent powers. Why should the other 185 feel any confidence that their interests will be taken into account? Their scholars are certain to remember that the 'collective hegemony' of the old system freed its members to help themselves to large swathes of Asia, Africa and Oceania, in the age of colonialism.

That is a legitimate concern, but in my view the overall distribution of power has now provided a context in which any repetition of that era is impossible. Even very tiny sovereignties, such as the Pacific Island states, have so much more capacity to make trouble for both local powers (like Australia) and even great powers (like China or Japan) that the imperial game is no longer worth the candle.

That indeed is a case of the new-found power of the weak. Even the Bush Administration noticed it early on. Their *National Security Strategy* of September 2002 mourned that, whereas in the past danger had always come from strong powers, it now came more from weak ones, failed or failing societies, vulnerable to non-state actors like Al Qaeda, and unable to resist takeover bids like that of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Those who argue (unconvincingly to my mind) that the United States is the heir of the sort of imperial drives that induced the Europeans to take over so much of Asia and Africa in the 19th century overlook the differences in social structure between, for instance, Britain then and the United States now. Then the poor of Britain and Ireland produced many children who found it hard to find gainful employment, except that young men could 'take the Queen's shilling'—enlist in the army and be at least assured of three meals a day, a uniform to wear, and a place to sleep. Such young men were often likely also to find a grave in Afghanistan, in the Sudan or in South Africa. The sons of the aristocracy (like the young Winston Churchill), if they were not very good at school, could be sent to serve as junior officers in India, devoting themselves to polo or reading, or both. The bright sons of the middle class could become officials, administering vast regions of India or Africa. Empire was an employment opportunity in a time when there were not many other avenues.

The economic situation in the United States nowadays is totally different. Economic opportunity (except for those at the bottom of the spectrum and most in need of it) is generally abundant. The unemployment rate is low: 4.5% in mid-2007. Recruitment to the armed services in those circumstances becomes quite difficult, except in traditional army families or among the disadvantaged (like African-Americans). For them, it has become (at least in the cases of the talented, like Colin Powell) a way to the very top. But some American consciences have become uneasy with the knowledge that, in Iraq for instance, so many of the deaths are occurring in so thin a slice of the population. The war in Iraq has made people aware that the concept of 'all volunteer' armed forces has its dark side and may not be sustainable.

All in all, if the United States has been engaged (as some have argued) in winning itself an overseas empire, the experience has aroused a strong distaste in part of the electorate for the human and financial costs it is now seen to entail.

Moreover, although this may seem cynical, one can argue that the progress of globalisation is in any case providing economically powerful societies, including the United States, with all the benefits which were once assumed to come from empire. So there is no extra economic advantage to set against those economic and human costs.

It might also be objected that any assumption about the 19th century Concert of Powers offering a pattern of diplomacy that could be of use to 21st century policy-makers overlooks the vast differences between the two societies of states concerned. I fully acknowledge those differences; my argument is that (despite their existence and probable persistence) an understanding of the enormous problems and dangers facing the contemporary society of states might and should induce the policy-makers of the great powers to put the rivalries and grudges they have (*and will continue to have*) vis-à-vis each other on 'the back burner', while the more pressing problems arising from outside their exclusive club are dealt with.

Those more pressing problems are, to repeat, the jihadists' war, the greater and much more long-term dangers arising from climate change, and the risks of more widespread possession of nuclear weapons among middle and minor powers like Iran and North Korea. None of those problems is even within sight of solution: indeed, they were all getting generally worse at time of writing (although concessions from North Korea in late 2007 seemed to go against this grain¹⁴). It may seem paradoxical to find a fringe benefit of sorts in three very serious and prospectively long-term global dangers, but if they reduce the probability of hegemonial war, in a world which will contain at least eight nuclear powers (possibility 10 or more), there is a certain logic in it. Moreover, the habit of cooperating in the reduction of those three very pressing dangers might even promote cooperation in other fields like the reduction of world poverty, the control of pandemics, and the worldwide improvement of educational opportunities.

THE END OF THE VASCO DA GAMA ERA:
THE NEXT LANDSCAPE OF WORLD POLITICS

Finally, the great powers of the possibly emerging Concert of Powers have reasons, far stronger than those which weighed on their predecessors in the 19th century, to avoid war. Then the great battles, like the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, were fought on distant grassy meadows. Now they are fought by the destruction of great cities like Baghdad. Or indeed perhaps London, Los Angeles, Moscow, Tokyo or Beijing. That is a sobering and prudence-evoking thought. Even the decision-makers and their families have no certainty of escaping danger. At the most crucial point of the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, some of the advisers around President Kennedy were asking whether they and their families would see the week out. The advent of asymmetric war since 2001 has further universalised and personalised danger in a way that was hardly present even then, at the most dangerous moment of the Cold War.

A clash of norms?

Although I expect the current multilateral détente among the great powers to be prolonged rather than damaged by the current non-traditional dangers mentioned above, there is another less well-defined factor which may permanently limit international consensus, even if it does not much damage détente. It is an inescapable clash of norms, which may for the foreseeable future always limit the level of consensus among governments. I am not raising the issue to the level of an inevitable clash of civilisations, or even of values. Norms are a less ambitious concept than either, and one more relevant to international dealings. The derivation of the word is from the Latin for a carpenter's set square. The set square tells the carpenter what a right angle is 'expected and required' to be. A social or political norm tells the people involved what 'expected and required behaviour' is '*in a particular society at a particular time*'. It provides a practical guide to practical activities. At the international level, if for instance you happen to be a Western woman traveling in Saudi Arabia, prudence as well as politeness indicates observance of the local norms: no alcohol, cover your hair, and do not drive. Those precautions operate only at the level of behaviour; they do not indicate any change of values. And norms are not set in stone: they shift quite radically, sometimes rapidly. That indeed is part of the present and prospective problem.

In the past, the norms of international politics were few and simple. There were only two that were really vital, and both are so old that

they are usually expressed in Latin phrases. The first was *pacta sunt servanda* (deals must be kept), without which one could hardly say that a society of states existed. The second was *cuius regio, eius religio* (the ruler gets to make the rules in his own domain). That one dates from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which is usually regarded as marking the beginning of the contemporary society of states.

It is also the norm which will be (and indeed is already) most under pressure in the current and prospective society of states. The newly sovereign societies of what we used to call the Third World are understandably very sensitive about what they construe as renewed invasions of their right to control their own affairs and choose their own social and political norms. But in the second half of the 20th century, in the final period of Western dominance, there was positively a hothouse growth of new and ambitious norms (or proposed norms) for the society of states. Everything from ‘whales are not for eating’ to the abolition of capital punishment. The most ambitious and potentially friction-bearing of these new norms centred on the concept that the international community should concern itself with ‘human security’ rather than (as in the past) merely with ‘national security’. And, moreover, that the society of states (which unlike the international community has armed forces at its command) should accept that responsibility to protect, if necessary by military action, citizens of other countries.

Those, undeniably, are worthy humanitarian concepts. But they are also loaded with international dynamite. For the entity most likely to endanger the ‘human security’ of individuals in many societies is their own government. Think of such extreme cases as the government of the Sudan in relation to the people of Darfur, the government of Zimbabwe in relation to any citizen who disagrees with it, or (in the recent past) the then sovereign government of Serbia in relation to the people of Kosovo. In a way, the Kosovo campaign indicates what the governments of quite a few countries might be apprehensive of if the responsibility to protect the individual human security of all the citizens of the international community were accepted by the society of states. The Western powers were sufficiently moved by the sight of Muslim Kosovars being exiled from their long-established home province of Kosovo by the Serbian

government to engage in a bombing campaign to bring Serbia’s then president to the negotiating table, and then to put a NATO force into the area. It is still there, almost a decade on, and Kosovo is in prospect of becoming an independent sovereignty.

In effect, the international community has detached from Serbia a province to which Serbs had a sentimental and nationalistic attachment. It is not difficult to see that China might imagine a parallel push over Tibet, or that Russia might imagine the same possibility over Chechnya, although it is much more likely that international action could be possible over, for instance, Darfur. However good the intent of the decision-makers concerned, such policies must inevitably establish both expectations and apprehensions: expectations in the case of oppressed communities in similar circumstances, and apprehensions in the minds of those governments conscious of a dissident province somewhere. For Canberra, some of them are in the area of Australia’s primary strategic concern. Think of Papua (still within Indonesian sovereignty) in comparison with East Timor, established now as a new small sovereignty, largely with Australian diplomatic and military means. The 1999 military action in East Timor established both expectations in Papua and apprehensions in Jakarta.

Basically, however, it is a problem for the international community as a whole, not just Australia. And the nature of the problem, unfortunately, is absolutely embedded in the unstoppable progress of technology. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, most people were little acquainted with the norms of their neighbours. In the 19th century, only those whose families were rich enough to allow them to make ‘the grand tour’ as young men (a very small political élite) could afford much travel. William Gladstone may have thundered against the ‘Bulgarian atrocities’ inflicted by the Ottoman Empire on its Christian subjects, but he was not really under much pressure to do anything forceful about them. Only since the communications explosion of the past 50 years or so has that situation changed, but it is now changing more rapidly every day, particularly with the use of television and the internet. Think of the sudden international fame of the ‘Baghdad Blogger’, one young man armed only with his computer, who managed

to make the war in Iraq more vivid to the outside world than most of the official press releases there.

*Knowledge of the way other societies live puts pressure on the norms of traditional societies, pressures which their respective establishments find almost intolerable.*¹⁵ That is particularly true of Islamic societies where a doctrine specifying the rules by which people should live was laid down in the 7th century. One of the reasons such societies regard the United States as ‘the Great Satan’ is that Satan is seen as ‘the great Tempter’, and the libertarianism of the United States and the West generally is seen as tempting their own young people to abandon their Islamic norms, transforming the relations between husbands and wives, parents and children. That is an enormously powerful threat to the structure of their societies, and even to their very identities. So it is not at all surprising that some of them take up arms against such ‘tempters’.

Luckily both China and India have shown remarkable readiness to accept the basic international norms of the society of states. As mentioned earlier, the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 is generally viewed as the beginning of that society, and one of the basic Westphalian norms was that the sovereign government gets to make the rules in its own domain. Most members of the current society of states are Westphalian in terms of that norm. The benign exception is the European Union, whose members certainly accept restrictions on national sovereignty, especially in economic matters, and also prescribe some social norms (no capital punishment for instance). So European Union states can be seen as almost post-Westphalian. There is also, unfortunately, a group of states who could now be said to be reverting to pre-Westphalian conditions, in that their governments are unable to make the rules for that society: there are stronger forces (political and especially military) within it which are calling the shots, often literally. The most obvious current examples are Iraq and Afghanistan, but there are others. So the world at the moment could be said to be divided between Westphalian, post-Westphalian and pre-Westphalian states, with norms to match. It is a source of current frictions, and there will be more in the future. So, one of the conditions of the maintenance of détente may be the

avoidance of too much ‘megaphone diplomacy’ about normative differences: in Australia’s case, for instance, Japanese whaling, or Singapore’s retention of capital punishment. Change may come earlier if it is not seen as yielding to foreign pressure.

The options for Canberra

Of the four forces of change mentioned at the outset of this essay as shaping the future landscape of world politics, the two most relevant to Australia in the long term are environmental change and the end of the Vasco da Gama era; that is, the end of the period of Western ascendancy over Asia. In the short to medium term, the jihadists' war is also likely to be of considerable significance. The issue most on the prime minister's mind in early 2007, however, seemed to be a more short-term factor: possible US acknowledgement of the failure of its Iraq strategy.

In an interview on ABC television in mid-February 2007, commenting on a statement by US Senator Barack Obama that, if elected president, he would pull the US troops out of Iraq, Australian Prime Minister John Howard said 'it is against the security interests of Australia for America to be defeated in Iraq ... that will be catastrophic for the West, and will have tremendously adverse consequences for Australia'.¹⁶ 'Catastrophic' and 'tremendously adverse' are strong terms. Apparently he was interpreting the acceptance of defeat in Iraq by Washington as so devastating a blow to US prestige and resolve in the world that it would induce an American retreat on other fronts, thus undermining the validity of the security connection to Australia.

Although defeat in Iraq is certainly likely to have more damaging effects worldwide than the defeat in Vietnam over 30 years ago (because it is going to be hailed as a defeat for 'the superpower' by a much more

worldwide constituency than was the case for Vietnam in the 1970s), it is just one very ill-chosen battlefield that would be abandoned, not the struggle as a whole. A forced withdrawal from Iraq, or (more likely) an early collapse soon after a US pullout, will probably mean an American tendency to 'draw in its horns' for a while. That certainly happened vis-à-vis the 1975 takeover by the North Vietnamese in Saigon, only three years after the settlement that had been cobbled together in 1972. Yet 30 years later, Vietnam was being seen, even by Rumsfeld, as a potential ally against any possible hegemonial ambitions in China. And East Asia, once portrayed as just a set of dominoes about to topple, is now a set of vigorous capitalist economies. A balance of power system, rightly understood, can readjust to or compensate for defeats, even a defeat that has to be accepted by the paramount power.

It is not at all likely that the United States will construe even the forced abandonment of its recent ill-considered ambitions in the Middle East as meaning that it must also abandon its commitments in the Asia-Pacific, where it is vastly more securely entrenched, and where its enormous assets in the way of military power can be very much more easily brought to bear on a possible adversary. The only conceivable adversary in that context is so obviously China that the question raises issues of the current signals from both sides about the future balance between them, and the attitudes of the other powers, including Australia, that are likely to be concerned with that balance.

On the indications from Washington in the final months of Bush's time in power, the prospects are that the bilateral system of alliances which the United States set up in Asia and the Pacific in 1951 in the early years of the Korean War may now have more chance of being converted into a multilateral system than ever before. It is currently patterned on what is known as the 'hub and spokes' model: Washington as the 'hub' having separate 'spokes' to each of its allies, but those allies not necessarily having much connection with, or obligation to, each other. The alternative pattern is of course that typified by NATO, a multilateral alliance in which each member has obligations to each of the others: 'an attack on one is an attack on all'.

In the international circumstances of 1951, the system then set up (called the San Francisco system) was the only one that was feasible. The fag-end of the colonial period still hung heavily on South and Southeast Asia: 'non-alignment' was the flavour of the decade for the area, especially India, where Jawaharlal Nehru was its most eloquent advocate. Many of the governments in the region were only just becoming viable. Resentment towards Japan, America's most vital ally, was still a far more prevalent and powerful emotion (in Australia but even more strongly in others) than fear or suspicion of China.

All that has changed enormously in the 56 years since, and the earlier Australian resistance to any move away from bilateralism ought to be reconsidered.¹⁷ The existing case against the containment of China (as set out in Joseph Nye's report of 1995 for President Bill Clinton, which held that it was neither necessary nor possible) still largely holds good but there is a difference between a 'containment' strategy and a 'balance' strategy. Containment in the NATO context rested on a coalition army deployed up to the borders of the old Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact, and prepared for a tank battle on the North German plain. Nothing of that sort could be contemplated in the case of China. 'Off-shore balancing', on the other hand, is quite a different thing, and a strategy that is quite compatible with a viable concert of powers, as it was for Britain in the old Concert of Powers.

The adjustments of US policy to accommodate the rise of Chinese power in respect to the cases of Taiwan and Korea seem to at least make somewhat less probable what have been the 'nightmare scenarios' for Canberra over the past 50 years — a possible war with China over either the status of Taiwan or some crisis on the Korean peninsula. US spokespeople had in the past made it abundantly clear that Washington would expect Australia to be a full participant in any resulting hostilities. As Australia's relations with China have become more and more important to us, that has proved to be a most dismaying prospect for us. Only continuing good relations between the United States and China can remove it permanently, but regional organisations like APEC make it possible for Australia to influence even that enormously important relationship. In particular, Canberra should be wary about the danger

that some pressures may develop in both Washington and Tokyo to cast China as 'outside the pale' because it is not a democracy. In view of the astounding rapidity with which China has changed in the mere 30 or so years since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, there is a case to be made that it may achieve that status in another 30 years. Some eminent economists are developing a sort of 'virtuous circle' theory: economic change induces social change which in turn generates a demand for more democracy, and more democracy promotes further economic change. It seems already exemplified in some Asian societies, and might in time work that transformation in China.¹⁸

As Australia's November 2007 election approached, the leadership of both parties visibly strove to make the most of the nuances of differences in their respective defence policies. Kevin Rudd emphasised the stress his government would put on the security of the local Pacific region, and indicated again his doubts about the Iraq commitment. John Howard emphasised his continued adherence to the remaining hopes and aspirations of the Bush policies, including Iraq, and the necessity of expeditionary forces. It was not clear, however, that either outcome would result in any immediate change in the disposition of Australian forces, or their future composition.

Decision-making has been easy, almost automatic, for Australian prime ministers during the 10 years of the recent unipolar world, and during the earlier bipolar world after the Second World War, because there was then no alternative 'great and powerful friend' to the United States, with equal interests in the Asia-Pacific region, and similar political values. But there is no reason for Canberra to view with apprehension the coming of a prospective multipolar world balance. We have no special enemy among the six great powers who appear likely to share the governance of that emerging world. Four of them — the United States, the European Union, India and Japan — are democracies whose norms we largely share. China and Russia are developing economically in ways that seem likely over time to provide the sociological basis for movement in that direction. Counting from the Magna Carta to the emancipation of women in the early 20th century, it took about 700 years to create the modern Western democratic state: we should not

be impatient if societies with less fortunate histories do not turn into model democracies overnight.

As middle powers go, Australia is exceptionally well endowed with both economic and strategic assets: remote location, a defensible sea-air gap, good access to intelligence, an alliance with the paramount power and efficient, well-trained and well-equipped forces. There is no need to mourn the end of the unipolar world: it bred the kind of military hubris that engendered the decision for the 'war of choice' in Iraq. The United States will remain the paramount power of the society of states, only in a multipolar world instead of a unipolar or bipolar one.

Retrospect

‘History does not repeat itself,’ noted Mark Twain ‘but sometimes it rhymes’.¹⁹ Such a ‘rhyming’ is what I have been suggesting between the 19th century and the 21st century. That is because in each case history evolved or is evolving a multipolar society of states, of a viable sort. The six-power balance now emerging is not unlike the stable five-power balance of the 19th century, and (what is more), it also provides a great preponderance of power on the side of the *status quo*. That is, the six emerging powers are all rich in resources or capacities or both, and there is not yet on the horizon any group equivalent to Germany, Japan and Italy in the 1930s, driven by social forces of the time to define themselves as ‘have not’ powers, prepared to wage hegemonial war for reasons of national aggrandisement, like Adolf Hitler’s ‘thousand year Reich’.

Unfortunately, the 20th century society of states never really achieved a stable multipolar power balance. The United States and the Soviet Union after 1918 withdrew into their respective kinds of isolation. Britain and France, heavily damaged by the First World War, were never strong enough to provide an adequate counterweight for maintenance of adequate deterrent power against the revisionist trio, Germany, Italy and Japan.

As always, much now depends on Washington’s currently changing attitudes. There is more interest among academics and others there in the ‘concert’ ideal than ever before,²⁰ but among some right-wing

THE END OF THE VASCO DA GAMA ERA:
THE NEXT LANDSCAPE OF WORLD POLITICS

US commentators it has morphed into the notion of a ‘concert of democracies’ *only*. That would be dangerous. The great powers must treat each other *as if they were* equals, even though they are not quite that in reality, and internal political change must be allowed time to do its work. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, still the Democrats’ great hero, said, in a speech (in Seattle, in November 1961) after a year’s experience of office had its sobering effect:

We must face the fact that the United States is neither omnipotent nor omniscient; that we are only 6 percent of the world’s population; that we cannot impose our will on the other 99 percent (sic) of mankind; that we cannot right every wrong or reverse each adversity; and that therefore there cannot be an American solution to every world problem.²¹

The next incumbent in the White House should bear that in mind.

The critics of Tony Blair’s settlement in Northern Ireland have called it a deal ‘between a bigot and a terrorist’. Exactly, and that is just what is needed in many such conflicts. The nice people in between, the liberal Catholics and tolerant Protestants and their equivalents in other conflicts, are not the trouble: the militant extremists are. But even if they themselves never renounce their prejudices, or cease to believe that political arguments should be settled by guns and bombs, their sons and grandsons may do so. I acknowledge the enormous distance between what the IRA demanded in the name of justice for Ireland, and what the jihadists demand in the name of justice for Islam. Yet the general acceptance of what was achieved for Ireland by 10 years of very patient diplomacy casts some doubt on the usefulness of ritual repetition of ‘no negotiation with terrorists’. Time has converted many of those originally so defined into interlocutors and even governments. But while time does its work, the Concert of Powers’ decision-makers must remember that their interests vis-à-vis each other (in avoiding hegemonial war) require keeping a ‘disconnect’ between themselves and the machinations of ‘non-state actors’ and minor powers.

Notes

- ¹ The most notable of them was George Kennan, then counsellor at the US Embassy in Moscow who, in 1946, suggested the ‘containment’ strategy which in time was credited with winning the Cold War. But quite a group of statesmen were eventually involved in the success of that strategy, including, in Europe, Churchill, Adenauer, De Gaulle, and Bevin (Attlee’s Foreign Secretary in Britain), as well as Dean Acheson (Truman’s Secretary of State). For an account, see Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The wise men*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1986.
- ² All population projections are based on UN Demography Department estimates for 2050. Demographers usually present high, medium and low projections of future populations, and I have used the medium projections. For an authoritative analytical approach, see Paul Demeny and Geoffrey McNicoll, *The political economy of global population change, 1950–2050*. Population Council, New York, 2006.
- ³ Paul Dibb, The bear is back. *American Interest*, Vol. II No. 2, November/December 2006, available at www.the-american-interest.com/ai2/article.cfm?Id=187&Mid=6, accessed 3 September 2007.
- ⁴ For more detailed estimates of China’s strategic capacity, see the Pentagon figures for 2007 in its *Annual Report to Congress: military power of the People’s Republic of China 2007*, available at www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/070523-China-Military-Power-final.pdf, accessed 3 September 2007.
- ⁵ Much of the information that has been published on the strategic rivalry between India and China in the Indian Ocean is of somewhat doubtful

- status. See Andrew Selth, *Burma's China connection and the Indian Ocean region*, SDSC Working Paper No. 377, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, October 2003, available at www.rspas.anu.edu.au/papers/sdsc/wp/wp_sdsc_377.pdf, accessed 3 September 2007, and Andrew Selth, *Burma's armed forces: power without glory*. Eastbridge, Norwalk, CT, 2002, for more detailed recent studies.
- ⁶ See Sandy Gordon, South Asian security challenges, in *Strategy and security in the Asia-Pacific*. Robert Ayson and Desmond Ball (eds), Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2006, pp 226–41.
- ⁷ The results of the July 2007 elections in Japan seem to indicate little variation in recent policies, although the composition of the Upper House changed and the term in office of Shinzo Abe ended not long after. Mr Abe's successor, Mr Fukuda, is reputed to be a 'dove' on security issues, but willing to endorse the current Japanese naval cooperation with the United States in the Indian Ocean.
- ⁸ See Russian President Vladimir Putin's 'Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy', 10 February 2007, available at www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=179, accessed 3 September 2007.
- ⁹ See Walter Russell Mead, The Jacksonian tradition in American foreign policy. *The National Interest*, No. 58, Winter 1999–2000, p 17.
- ¹⁰ For a full analysis of the many diverse schools of interpretation of current US foreign policy, see Hans Binnendijk and Richard L. Kugler, *Seeing the elephant: The U.S. role in global security*. National Defense University Press and Potomac Books, Inc., Washington, D.C., 2006.
- ¹¹ Transcript of Senator Barack Obama's remarks to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 23 April 2007, available at www.thechicagocouncil.org/dynamic_page.php?id=64, accessed 3 September 2007. See also Bernard Lewis, *The crisis of Islam: holy war and unholy terror*. Phoenix, London, 2003, p. 19.
- ¹² US President George Bush, Inaugural Address (Second Term), 20 January 2005, available at www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural/, accessed 3 September 2007.
- ¹³ Lewis, *The crisis of Islam: holy war and unholy terror*, pp 22–23.
- ¹⁴ China's role in this development appeared crucial and the deal, if carried through, might represent a defeat for the North Korea 'hawks' in Washington.
- ¹⁵ See Coral Bell, Normative shift. *The National Interest*, Issue No. 70, Winter 2002/2003, pp 44–54, for more analysis of this issue. The practical aspect in which this matter would be felt in many families is choice of marriage partners. The young are tempted to demand the right to choose their own spouses: the elders to demand that they agree to arranged marriages, which are seen as the basis of family cohesion. The rebellion of daughters is particularly regarded as a source of shame to the whole family, and even demands 'honour killings' by fathers or brothers.
- ¹⁶ See Australian PM stands by Obama attack, 12 February 2007, CNN.com, available at www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/02/12/obama.comment/index.html?eref=rss_politics, accessed 3 September 2007. See also transcript of Kerry O'Brien television interview with John Howard on ABC 7:30 Report, 13 February 2007, available at www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s1847070.htm, accessed 3 September 2007; and transcript of Chris Uhlmann radio interview with John Howard on AM Program, ABC Radio, 15 February 2007, available at www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2007/Interview23904.cfm, accessed 3 September 2007.
- ¹⁷ The only real crisis of the ANZUS negotiations in 1951 arose when New Zealand appeared to favour a UK suggestion that it also be a member. John Foster Dulles, who was conducting the US negotiations (although not yet Secretary of State) was averse, and Canberra persuaded New Zealand to give up the notion. The minister's attitude at the time was based on the assumption that it would be to Australia's advantage to be the major voice in Washington's ear at a time of future crisis, an assumption proved erroneous, to my mind, as early as the Vietnam crises of the 1950s and 1960s. See the author's *Dependent ally*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986. On the whole, middle and minor powers advance their capacity to influence great powers when members of multilateral organisations as, for instance, Poland in NATO or Cyprus in the European Union.
- ¹⁸ See, for instance, Harvard University's Benjamin M. Friedman, *The moral consequences of economic growth*. Knopf, Random House, New York, 2005.
- ¹⁹ This quote and its variations ('The past does not repeat itself, but it rhymes'; 'History does not repeat itself, its stutters') are attributed to Mark Twain.

THE END OF THE VASCO DA GAMA ERA:
THE NEXT LANDSCAPE OF WORLD POLITICS

See also the quote 'It is not worthwhile to try to keep history from repeating itself, for man's character will always make the preventing of the repetitions impossible' in *Mark Twain in eruption: hitherto unpublished pages about men and events*. Bernard DeVoto (ed.), Harper, New York, 1940; and *The wit and wisdom of Mark Twain*. Alex Ayres (ed.), HarperCollins, 1987.

²⁰ A speech by the then US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick in 2005 is the only official US statement made public which seemed to me to deal in 'concert of powers' rather than 'balance of power' concepts. He is now at the World Bank, so the continuing influence of such concepts must remain uncertain. But the signal seems to have been instantly understood and welcomed by China. When Zoellick left the State Department, the official English-language Chinese publication noted his departure with a sort of 'thank you' article.

²¹ Speech by John Fitzgerald Kennedy at the University of Washington 100th Anniversary, 16 November 1961. Audio and text versions are available at www.millercenter.virginia.edu/scripps/digitalarchive/speechDetail/27, accessed 3 September 2007. For an audio version only, refer John F Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum, available at www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/, accessed 3 September 2007.

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