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Anti-Americanism or Sans Americans:
What Can Middle Powers Do to Promote Global Security?

Whether or not John Bolton is authorized by the US Senate to become the American ambassador to the United Nations, his fierce hostility to international law, which he denounces as a threat to the sovereignty of the United States, remains one of the Bush administration's most disturbing hallmarks. The Bush administration's scorn for multilateralism is also a principal concern for the rest of the international community where what should be done about the United States' rogue behaviour remains a matter for urgent debate.

A powerful theme running through the resulting work of foreign analysts of present US policy is a different kind of hostility that decries the manicheism of George Bush or the dogmatism of Donald Rumsfeld. Despair at the current Administration's arrogant mix of overbearing patriotism and heavy-handed militarism can easily morph into a facile anti-Americanism. Commentators who, in turn, denounce critics of US unilateralism on the grounds that anti-Americanism is empty as a rationale for other countries' foreign policy make a good point. Bewailing the Bush Doctrine's misguided rejection of multilateral approaches to world problems does not, of course, solve anything on its own, even if it provides an easy out for those who enjoy criticizing in lieu of taking responsibility themselves.

Considerably more difficult is to think through how a rival great power such as the European Union or middle powers such as Canada or Mexico should respond to their concern that Washington's approach to world politics remains dangerously misguided.

A first step is to distinguish situations where there is some room for the international community to act from those where the US has a monopoly on the issue.

The tragic spectacle of Iraq's suffering reminds us that, while supporting George Bush's mendaciously rationalized war on Saddam Hussain would have been morally untenable, opposing it had no constructive value -- other than to sap the war's legitimacy – because the United States achieved complete control apart from the domestic resistance.

In most other international issues – particularly where Washington is ambivalent, undecided, or indifferent, there is considerably more room for other countries to intervene creatively

To put the rest of the world's Bush problem in context, we need to remember that, in 1995, US power reached its apogee with the creation of the World Trade Organization which globalized American economic norms. This was a hegemony in which the international economic régime, which was designed and led by the USA, enjoyed a very

high degree of consensual support among the other members. What happened was that, in 2003, US power morphed into empire when the action Washington proposed for Iraq did not enjoy an international consensus and had to be executed unilaterally.

Ironically, the United States is far less powerful today as an Empire, whose proclivity for unilateralism is opposed by its partners, than it was as a hegemon ten years ago, when its partners willingly collaborated with it.

The administration's foreign-policy legitimacy deficit provides the international community with an opportunity to free itself of a long-standing attitude that nothing much can be achieved on the global level without the United States' leadership. Now to the contrary, the vacuum created by Washington can be filled by others. The question becomes first who, then how.

The most obvious response to the spectacle of a failed American hegemony is to seek another, more benign hegemon to take its place. For better or for worse, the European Union is still groping its way towards establishing sufficient continental unity of body and soul that it can implement its much trumpeted Common Foreign and Security Policy. In diplomatic terms, Europe remains primarily 20 different countries each with its own foreign policy ambitions.

With no prospect for a new hegemon filling the vacuum left by an American leadership gone off the rails, there may be some mileage to be made by rehabilitating an old theme in Canadian diplomacy, the role of the middle power, which has gone through a number of incarnations.

In the golden days of North Atlantic diplomacy during and immediately after World War II, Canada found itself in a strategic position interacting with the two leading powers of the day , the US and Great Britain, as they reconstituted the international order.

During the Cold War, Canada's strategic position on the flight path between the Soviet Union and the United States gave "middle power" a more macabre connotation as Canada found itself, through the North American Air Defence Command integrated in the United States' nuclear war machine.

In the post-September 11 era, with the United States marginalizing itself internationally through its paranoia about terrorism, there are a considerable number of large and middle-sized powers which have an even more considerable capacity to address some of the central issues threatening the world's survival. Exacerbated world poverty, endangered capacity for environmental sustainability, uncontrolled pandemics, genocidal civil wars ravaging the populations of failed states, global crime syndicates: listing the critical issues facing the world offers a Herculean challenge to those countries that are willing to face the obvious.

If the United States has read itself out of the game because of its hostility to multilateral approaches to anything other than making war, a large, if not dominant country – that is,

a middle power -- can make a significant contribution, particularly if it can articulate a sensible strategy and then generate enough support for it to be implemented.

Sensible Strategy

Under the leadership of Lloyd Axworthy, the Canadian government in the late 1990s already articulated a foreign-policy rationale around the notion of "human security". Under this rubric, Axworthy successfully made the case both for an international treaty to ban the use of anti-personnel landmines and for a convention to establish an International Criminal Court to bring to justice the perpetrators of such gross violations of human rights as genocide.

Boosted by these resounding achievements, the notion of human security has taken off as a broader, more appropriate notion for organizing the international community's actions in strife-torn areas. Negatively, it asserts that simply achieving a cease-fire between warring groups or defeating a dangerous military force is not enough. The absence of shooting does not amount to the presence of security for the human beings living in a devastated zone. Positively, exponents of a human-security approach assert that people in dysfunctional régimes need shelter, food, adequate income, medical care, and a functioning political process that responds to their interests.

Useful though it has been for reframing international action in war-torn areas, human security is too narrow a notion to constitute a complete foreign-policy doctrine. Were it to be broadened to embrace less tangible, though no less important considerations such as societal and cultural concerns – let us call it human *cultural* security – we might have a rubric under which a viable approach to global politics could be advanced that did not depend on American participation.

The prime idea – all human societies need a basic degree of safety to provide the preconditions for an acceptable level of collective and individual existence -- would remain, but the notion of security would be broadened to recognize that societies as cultures need three more attributes beyond an absence of fighting or a minimum economic and political infrastructure.

First, and at the most general level, human cultures require a life-sustaining environment – enough water and safe air for starters – to be able to survive. A foreign policy promoting human cultural security would therefore have to make a prime commitment – along with the monetary muscle to give it expression – to environmental sustainability, including rescuing the atmosphere from its disintegration. In practice, this would mean allocating enough international muscle to multilateral environmental agreements so that they had clout superior to that of the global trade and investment norms of the World Trade Organization.

Next, human cultures need to be understood as political communities with a right to flourish. While the right to enjoy the capacity for self-directed development is taken for granted in developed nation states, which devote massive resources to their public

domains, the poorest and weakest communities on the periphery of the world order – many without their own viable state structure – are in desperate need for a recognition and support that go beyond attempts to alleviate their poverty. A foreign policy doctrine designed around human cultural security would accept as its premise a broader conception of development than economic progress.

Third, if we understand human cultures as comprising their own value systems, then we need to recognize that distinct societies are human cultures which can only thrive if they enjoy an autonomous capacity to nurture their traditions, share their values, tell their own stories, and communicate their ideas without being subjected to assimilation by a more powerful cultures through its control of the communications media. As a foreign-policy doctrine, human cultural security would have to embrace the norm that cultural diversity should trump such economic values as global rights for transnational enterprise.

Support for Implementation

It is, of course, easy to formulate a vision for a world that enjoys justice, peace, and the full development of all human cultures. It is just as difficult to imagine how the more powerful and prosperous nation states -- each of which necessarily favours the interests of its own citizens over those of the rest of the world – might engage in a policy that would entail self-sacrifice and require high levels of multilateral cooperation.

But, if we have reached the point where such phenomena as the ozone layer's depletion and global warming are putting in question the survival of rich as well as poor cultures, we may be ready to recognize that self-interest requires the rich to help the destitute to correct the global disorder.

And, if a heightened consciousness of the dangers of terrorism can help us understand that cultural as well as economic disparities engender the extreme rage that can provoke Ground-Zero type attacks in any prosperous country, security becomes an overriding concern everywhere. Then, if we see that no amount of border policing or immigration controls can prevent dedicated militants from wreaking their havoc, we may be prepared to dedicate ourselves to a self-interested eradication of the causes of alienation in the precarious cultures of the world.

Finally, all countries concerned about maintaining their own cultural identities in the face of relentless pressure from transnational media conglomerates should be able to recognize that the likelihood of their preserving their own national cultures will be enhanced by a global régime for which defending cultural diversity is a prime value.

Once it becomes conceivable that self-centred nations can genuinely, and not just rhetorically, embrace the interests of the global community in order to secure their own vital interests, we can envisage a coalition of like-minded powers – large, medium, and small – adopting a human cultural security as a rationale articulating a broad, comprehensive, and cooperative foreign policy for those who can recognize the writing on the world's wall.

At this stage, we can return to our opening concerns. An anti-Americanism that contents itself with criticizing the blindness and destructiveness of the Bush administration's foreign and military policies provides no alternative. Other countries are not prevented from proclaiming an alternative vision and pursuing it directly on their own, albeit with the hope that, to be more effective, it would benefit from the participation and support of a United States that has retuned to a more balanced view of itself and its global environment.

Neither a large power nor powerless, Canada could – if it were to realize its own long-term interests are at stake – take a lead as a middle power, in the same way it did over the formation of an International Criminal Court, in developing an international consensus that offered a viable alternative to Washington's unilateralism by proactively and constructively addressing our global need for human cultural security. Crucial to the success of such an approach would be a buy-in by the major members of the European Union, by Japan, and by the leading powers in the Third World such as Brazil, India, and China. Ultimately, positive results might tempt a more moderate, less unilateralist Washington to throw its support behind initiatives aimed to make it possible even for the United States to continue to blossom as a great culture.