

Working Paper Series No. 139

A WORLD IN FLUX
The development of global power relations
and order

Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh

January 1993

Draft, not to be quoted.

Paper prepared for the Conference 'Restructured Europe and India in a Global Perspective' organised by the Indo-Dutch programme on Alternatives in Development, Beekbergen, The Netherlands, 7-10 December 1992.

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‘Those who talk of a unipolar world confuse America’s unmatched military might with a preponderance of real power.’

Stanley Hoffmann (1992)

1. Background: The gap between global interdependences and global order

The fundamental problem of the modern world was until recently disguised by the all pervasive hegemonic rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States and the order it imposed. Confusion and uncertainty took its place, rather than the ‘new world order’ President Bush saw glimmering on the horizon of the Gulf.

Problems galore: the UN is already becoming overextended in relation to its limited financial means and power; the European Community is in trouble and unlikely to relieve the economic and political instability in the Eastern half of Europe; global financial and currency markets seem to be running out of control; conflict potential in Asia appears on the increase; prospects of a ‘peace dividend’ being used at least in part for development cooperation have come to naught; the war in former Yugoslavia makes a mockery out of the high hopes for a new European security order, while words fail in face of the violence in Somalia. And these problems are only the most glaring ones at the time of writing.

Still, the globalization of interdependences - political and security, economic and monetary, scientific and technological, ecological and communications - continues apace, if spurred on by market considerations rather than by governmental action. Globalization appears to be irreversible, but for a catastrophe with worldwide effects. But this unplanned process is not matched by the creation of global institutions capable of coordinating and regulating the increasingly extended, dense and complex global interdependences. All state societies are becoming more and more dependent on that global network, which nobody controls as such, whether the UN-system or the great powers. It is therefore very vulnerable to disruption.

This gap between the rapid development of global interdependencies and transnational markets, and the lagging behind of global institutions is the fundamental problem of the modern world. The larger that gap, the more states remain forced to help themselves, to define their vital interests in a narrow, self-centered manner, and to regard competition and rivalry with other states as more important than durable cooperation.

Such a skewed relationship between what in shorthand can be called differentiation (of social and economic functions) and integration (of political functions) has existed before, if on a smaller scale. Norbert Elias has noted about the early capitalist industrializing states: 'functional differentiation ... lurches forward, outstripping the development of the integrating and coordinating institutions of the time' (Elias, 1978, p.141). The welfare state, and more in general, the extension of the functions of government, developed in response to this unplanned process of rapidly growing differentiation of social and economic functions, which led to a new kind of class structure and to increasing conflict potential. The 'steamkettle' metaphor began to be widely used in the late 19th century. One can describe what followed, the integrating phase in the development of industrializing states, as 'nation formation', summarily defined as the process whereby working man - by a combination of pressure from below and enlightened policies from above (Bismarck, Beveridge) - obtained the fatherland he did not yet have when Marx and Engels wrote their Communist Manifesto.

At the global level, however, this process is still in a very early phase. The growth of interdependencies and markets still outstrips the development of integrating and coordinating institutions, of a viable world order. A global welfare state, though a first step has been taken in the form of development cooperation, is still beyond the horizon. In terms of security, economic and monetary development or environmental problems global coordination and regulation are still rudimentary. It is not yet a commonplace that humanity has to acquire a functional equivalent of the central monopoly of violence of the state if international relations are to be durably pacified, and in a time of reviving nationalism it is utopian to say that humanity must begin to be seen as a global 'nation', if global problems are to be solved. Still, the recognition of the universality of human rights can be seen as a first step in that direction.

But in fact humanity has already become one interdependent whole, one global economy and - because of the threats of nuclear war and ecological catastrophe - one single survival unit.

The implications of the increasing density, complexity, and universality of global interdependencies are not sufficiently understood. Our knowledge of the precise workings of global interdependency networks is very limited. The costs and benefits for specific societies are seldom clear. The debates before the referenda on the Maastricht Treaty in Denmark and France have shown this even on the smaller scale of European integration, where the integration process was already well tried out. What goes on within state-societies appears much more transparent and easier to describe and understand than the seemingly fuzzy structure of global or regional interdependencies. Migration and refugee movements as visible manifestations of such interdependencies are narrowly interpreted from a purely national perspective as threats to what is regarded as 'our' property. The idea of national sovereignty is still quite powerful. Most people continue to see the world primarily in terms of 'us' and 'them', personifying the relations between states. The crucial importance of the development of global or even regional interdependencies for domestic economic and political development and security remains unrecognized in such a natiocentric view. But state-societies, though still the world's most important constitutive parts, are becoming more and more dependent on the development of the whole, of the global network of interdependencies.

Communication networks, not only in terms of transport but also of mass communications have expanded enormously and connect the different parts of the world more and more closely. Life styles are becoming more similar. But the growth of mass communication is not only a unifying force. It has also more and more reduced the 'sharp gap that once prevailed between what rural folk knew and experienced and what urban populations knew and experienced...', (which constitutes) the most fundamental social and political change wrought by the technological transformations of the twentieth century' (McNeill, 1990, p.153). This leveling process contributed to the spread of nationalism, closely connected with the revolution of rising expectations and frustrations mass communications produced.

Information and communication technology, on the other hand, increasingly constitute the competitive edge in economic development. In nearly all national economies international trade, finance and investment have become indispensable for technological and economic development. Science and technology are universal in their applications, though not in their initial development. But the fruits of technological development can only be obtained by participating in the global transmission of scientific and technological know-how. Though actual transmission is defective from the perspective of most countries in the South, there is no alternative.

Self-reliance, as first practiced by Stalin in the form of 'socialism in one country', could still work in the 'iron and steel' phase of industrialization, but later led to the stagnation, waste, and lack of competitiveness characterizing the Soviet and other economies after 1945. The breakdown of the Soviet Union despite its enormous military power has made it clear that even a very strong state can no longer afford to go it alone, to break or fail to cultivate the technological and economic interdependencies that bind it to the world at large. There is no escape from global economic and technological competition, least of all for great powers.

But global interdependencies do not benefit all societies equally. Small states at a low level of development may indeed come close to a situation of unilateral 'dependency', but, as the example of Birma (or Myanmar) shows, self-reliance as the response easily becomes debilitating.

Still, global interdependence remains asymmetrical. The global economy is characterized by fierce competition and concentration of economic and financial power. This means that, just as in early industrializing states, political stability and social cohesion in the world at large can only be increased by expanding global government. Without such an effort the global economy may well break down, harming both strong and weak, rich and poor. The great powers and other advanced states have become more dependent on their dependents. This growing interdependence of North on South has been strengthened by the problems of the global 'environment', which do not respect any borders. The degree of asymmetry in global interdependencies is becoming smaller.

That process is strengthened by the development of military technology and the global spread of military capabilities. In the past, great powers could still unilaterally assure their 'national security' by keeping their military capabilities superior or at least equal to those of other great powers. Those states could be called great powers that were still in the race, participated actively in the struggle for or against hegemony. Military capability provided great power status. But land powers were more vulnerable to attack than insular sea powers. Great Britain, the United States and Japan were to all practical purposes invulnerable, which gave especially the first two a special position as balancers of continental power relations. That time is past. Now long distance bombers, ballistic missiles and cruise missiles have made all borders permeable and all states vulnerable to attack. National security can no longer be unilaterally guaranteed - though Reagan's SDI showed that the temptation remained. But the meaning of vulnerability was clearly demonstrated by the consequences of the relatively minor explosion of the nuclear power station at Chernobyl. Not only the risk of escalation has changed the cost-benefit calculations of any military confrontation, but also the enormous increase in destructive power of 'conventional' weapons. Military technology has become the proverbial snake biting in his own tail. As Evan Luard has written: 'the end to national security' has come, in the sense that global and regional security arrangements have become indispensable. (Luard, 1991.) Though normatively Luard is no doubt right, the globalization of security interdependencies is not yet matched by the institutions necessary to deal with them, so international politics will to a greater or smaller extent remain subject to the regularities of security dilemma and friend-enemy logic. What has changed, what remains the same? Is the dynamic of great power relations still the same, despite the development of global interdependencies or can it be mitigated - or even made to lose its teeth completely - by global and regional collective security arrangements?

2. The meaning of power

In the past great power rivalry allowed for only two solutions to world order: balance of power and hegemony, that could shade over into empire (as in Rome or China). Balance of power and hegemony are two sides of the same coin.

Balance of power policy aims at preventing the hegemony of one of the great powers in a multipolar interstate figuration; if it fails the hegemonist can still be defeated by a 'balancing' war coalition. That happened to the two continental hegemonists Napoleon's France and Hitler's Germany.

Neither of the two solutions is stable. In a bipolar figuration balance of power has a different meaning: that the two rivals are equally strong and cannot hope to simply defeat the opponent. It refers to a balance of capabilities. But historically, in most cases of such hegemonic rivalry such a balance - always subject to perceptions, always uncertain - has not prevented war.

No solution is stable. They are rather the last phases of the process of concentration of power inherent in any competition between independent units. Some powers come up, while others decline and are eliminated from the competition.

Should we therefore expect that great power struggle is only temporarily dormant after the end of the Cold War and will eventually be resumed, though with different participants?

Again, can we extrapolate from the past in that way? Must any world order be dependent only on great power relations? Or can a new and different approach to world order become feasible? Can the hegemony-balance of power relationship be transcended, wholly or in part?

To approach these difficult questions we should first discuss the meaning of 'power'. What are the differences -and similarities - between power in international relations in the past and power in the evolving global society? To clarify the issues the concept of power itself must be examined first, before discussing substance.

One source of confusion about the meaning of power is the failure to distinguish between the power to and power over. Power can be a capacity, ie the power of a government or an individual to achieve certain results or aims. Power can also describe a relation, ie the power A has over B to shape B's conduct according to his own preferences. Though the two meanings

are different, they are connected: power to is one of the conditions for power over. Without a superior military capability or economic prowess a state can not become (or remain) a great power. But the capacity to send an interventionary force does not mean that the intervention will succeed.

A second, related source of confusion is the widespread tendency to think of power as a substance, as something that one 'has' and the other has not. But power is not something tangible that one can have in one's pocket in the same way as money. Such reification presents power as a one-sided relationship, between the powerful and the powerless, the haves and the have nots. But again, whether power will indeed come out of the barrel of a gun depends on the nature of a relationship, just as much as on the quality of the guns.

Max Weber described (or defined) power in a more realistic manner as 'any chance within a social relationship to impose one's will, also against resistance, regardless of the basis on which this chance rests'. (Weber, 1972)

In this conception of power as a relation three aspects can be distinguished: the basis for the chance of imposing one's will (against resistance). That can be translated in a distinction between power resources, power chances and power balances. Power resources (the 'basis') are very diverse ('regardless of'). They can be psychological, ideological, military, economic, financial, organizational, scientific-technological, etc. And not only that, their relative weight is not predetermined, nor easily ascertained. Totalitarian states are characterized by the fact that they not just possess a monopoly over the means of violence and taxation as all states do, but also over the means of production, orientation (ideology), communication, education and organization. But such monopolization of power resources by state and party damaged the initiative and motivation of the population to such an extent that it weakened the overall power base of these states. How power resources exactly combine at a given time (the weight of power resources does not remain constant) into the overall power base of a state can only be roughly estimated. There is no yardstick through which different power resources can be added up into one figure. For that reason power chances can also be only roughly estimated rather than expressed in the 1:2 or 1:4 relationships associated with the bookmaker's view of chance. To

speak of power chances implies that power resources cannot be directly translated into imposing one's will. A smaller or larger power base can only make for greater or smaller power chances, not provide certainties. There are very few situations where power resources are distributed in such a manner that one side in a relation has no power at all. Slaves fulfill important functions for their master providing them with certain power resources and chances, even though the power resource differentials between them are very great.

Power relations therefore always have to be seen as balances, more or less asymmetrical. The nuclear revolution made the power balance between the Soviet Union and the United States fully symmetrical - notwithstanding considerable asymmetry in most other kinds of power resources - because of the possibility that any military confrontation between them could escalate to mutual destruction. But most power balances are characterized by a greater or smaller degree of asymmetry, and by uncertainty about the outcome of testing the balance by the use of violence or in negotiations. The degree of asymmetry of power balances can not just be determined by estimating power resource differentials, even if these could be subsumed under one criterion. They do not depend only on power resource differentials, but also on the relative value of different power resources and on the wider regional or global context. American power chances with respect to Vietnam were - probably decisively - curtailed by the risk of a nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union. The asymmetry in the power balance between the United States and its Vietnamese opponent was also much smaller than expected, because the value of certain power resources (organization, mobilization, motivation) could only become clear during the war itself.

The nature of any power balance - glaring differences excepted - can only be established if it is tested. If only for that reason, the development of international politics can not be predicted. (Cf. Jervis, 1992). The events of 1989, as the surprise of the century, call in any case for modesty.

3. The peaceful end of the Cold War

The Cold War came to end peacefully - for the first time in history - because great power rivalry was tamed by the danger of nuclear war. (See van Benthem van den Bergh, 1992) Hegemonic rivalry was no longer a simple elimination struggle that could only be decided by military confrontation - a great war - as in the past. The nuclear revolution forced the rivals to cooperate in reducing the risk of a confrontation as that would no longer result in the elimination of only one of the two but of both. This need for crisis prevention became clear by the course of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. So nuclear weapons, which gave the US and the SU their status of the two great powers, became at the same time a source of political impotence. For that reason - and because of the growth of global interdependencies - economic power resources could become more important for having global political clout than military capability. The relative pacification the bipolar order implied allowed a number of countries to break the connection between economic development and military build up still necessary before 1945. See Kennedy, 1987) This led to the new phenomenon of economic great powers like Japan and Germany, and East Asia and Western Europe as strong economic regions. To keep on being a great power in that changing world, the Soviet Union had to reform, had to become a 'modern' power and participate fully in the new information and communication based global economy. That 'new thinking' about security cooperation rather than conflict was needed to achieve this, was Gorbachev's great achievement. It should be realized how unprecedented it was that on the basis of that reevaluation a great power let an empire go, for which it had fought at great sacrifice and which it had considered until then essential for its own security and strategy in war. After the Soviet Union gave up control over Eastern Europe, domestic reform led to decline rather than improvement, and a coup had failed, centrifugal forces in the Soviet Union could no longer be contained.

After the fading away of the Soviet Union the world is no longer bipolar. But the balance of mutual destruction capabilities remains in existence between Russia and the US - and for that matter between all five full nuclear powers. The meaning of the nuclear revolution - that war between nuclear great powers has become impossible - has not changed after the disappearance

of the Soviet Union. The fate of the Soviet Union also makes clear that to be a great power at the present level of global interdependencies requires more than being able to maintain a large nuclear and conventional military capability. Nuclear capabilities of great powers have no meaning - except a deterrent one - against third powers. They cannot be used to positive political purpose. Apart from the destruction wrought and the consequences that would have for domestic public opinion and for the international reputation of the user, their actual use would probably fatally influence their relations with other nuclear powers. Conventional military capability does not automatically translate into real power either, as the two rivals discovered respectively in Afghanistan and Vietnam.

To combine military build up with domestic prosperity and social policies has become more difficult to reconcile for the great powers, as the United States has also experienced. Domestic constraints for global rivalry and projection of power increased and seem to be still increasing further, as the Presidential campaign in the United States shows. This can also be seen in the reluctance of the United States and the European states to sacrifice soldiers to stop the civil war in Yugoslavia. In that sense the Gulf war was hardly a precedent. That demonstrated that the United States can no longer intervene alone, nor finance a large scale intervention. It should also be realized that the number of regional powers with sizable military capabilities continues to grow.

That any great power in the world, now or in the future, could assume the role of world policeman has become an outlandish idea. Global hegemony has anyway become excluded by the impossibility of waging a decisive 'great war' as before the nuclear revolution.

4. Properties of the bipolar world order

What does this change mean for the future of global power relations? Before discussing possible directions of development, the properties of the past world order should be analysed in greater detail. It is perhaps a bit unusual to see the cold war (described more adequately as hegemonic rivalry, Lebow and Strauss, 1991), as a form of world order. But this may be easier, now that

the division of the world in friend, enemies and non-aligned powers no longer exists. The ideological ordering of the world, that determined even the domestic political spectrum of practically all countries of the world, made people see only struggle and conflict. But in hindsight the world order functions of hegemonic rivalry are clear enough.

These order functions were threefold: order within the preserves of the rivals, order between these, and order outside them.

The first aspect is usually called 'hegemony' or 'empire'. Both terms are somewhat misleading. Empire implies formal rule of a center over subjected territories outside the 'home' country. In that sense neither the preserves or alliances of the United States or the Soviet Union were empires, though as a result of conquest that of the Soviet Union at first came closer. With respect to the relation between the United States and Western Europe the term 'empire by invitation' has been introduced (Lundestad, 1986), but that is a contradiction in terms. The concept of hegemony too is confusing, because bipolar rivalry was precisely about preventing the adversary from acquiring hegemony or obtaining it oneself. It was rather within their own alliances that preponderance of military and political-economic power resources provided both rivals with an ordering and regulating capacity. In the case of the United States that capacity stretched out to the global market economy. Order means first that within their own preserves relations were pacified (Joffe, 1984) and conflicts either suppressed or subdued. That is now becoming especially clear in the Eastern half of Europe, but it also applied to the relations between Turkey and Greece, and earlier between France and Germany. Pacification also had an economic order function, more successful in the West than in the East, if we compare the European Community with Comecon. American power also stretched out in East Asia, preserving stability in Korea and providing Japan with the security needed to become a global economic power. American preponderance formed the backbone of global institutions for economic and financial regulation like the Bretton Woods organizations and GATT. The United States in fact prepared the way for the rise of its own economic rivals, the EC and Japan.

The Soviet position was much more rigid, in part because the American sphere was based on liberal-democratic regimes and could refrain from the kind of coercion - including military intervention - the Soviet Union applied. But its relative power also showed secular decline, far before its demise.

Now the question has become whether the achievements of the regional and global ordering capacity of the United States can survive the end of hegemonic rivalry.

The second aspect, order between the rivals has become a unique feature of the US-SU relationship, never seen before. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962, with which the cold war proper came to an end, taught the rivals that even a serious political crisis between them could escalate up to nuclear war. Henceforth they would be forced to avoid crises, to engage in different forms of security cooperation and to take each other's security requirements into account. Though this was not made explicit before Gorbachev's 'new thinking', the rivals behaved according to this long before that. The nuclear revolution forced both rivals to behave very cautiously and with unprecedented restraint, pacifying their relationship. That this was also a form of order becomes clear when one contemplates what its absence could have meant.

The third aspect, order outside the rivals own preserves, is more controversial. Both rivals intervened a number of times military in that 'third' world, making it more plausible to see them as 'imperialist' than as providing order to the world. Still, there to, hegemonic rivalry was subjected to constraints imposed by the risk of nuclear escalation. There was no 'scramble for the Third World' as there had been a scramble for Africa before. Though the Third World was the only area available for active competition, it was strategically not one of a piece.

What then did the order, the regulation or limitation of the rivalry in the world at large consist of? Again, order resulted from the necessity to avoid the risk of nuclear escalation thereby enforcing restraint. But whose restraint? In the direct relations between the rivals that problem was solved after the Cuban confrontation by beginning at the earliest stage of crisis avoidance.

That in turn was facilitated by the fact that in Europe, the central stage, the vital stakes of the rivals were clearly demarcated and symmetrical.

In that relation between the vital stakes of the rivals the principle as well as the degree of order are to be found. In the Third World the stakes of the rivals were less clearly demarcated. The stalemate in Europe also made them perceive control of the Third World as decisive in the struggle for hegemony. Still, they managed to avoid a direct confrontation between them. How then could they balance active pursuit of competition with the need for crisis prevention?

The answer is to be found in the relation between the great powers' stakes in a particular region or country. There are four possibilities: the rivals could both have vital stakes(A) or not (D); the United States could have a vital stake and the Soviet Union not(B) or vice versa(C).

For category A Europe is the model. But, though less well demarcated, it applies also to the Middle East. For both rivals it was a vital stake that this region would not come under the control of the adversary. It was therefore potentially the most dangerous region of the world. But if it would have exploded, a direct confrontation between the rivals would have been likely. Therefore they were careful, being mainly engaged in balancing, while at the same time restraining their allies, as far as possible. (Would Saddam Hussein's attack on Kuwait have been possible before 1989?) In that way a degree of order was maintained, not as self-evident as it may appear.

Categories B and C covered primarily the respective 'backyards' of the rivals, Central and Latin America and Eastern Europe respectively. Because of the asymmetrical relation between vital stakes the rivals could intervene there without having to fear a military response nor, therefore, the risk of escalation. The opponent, of course, could not. This was made clear by the Cuban missile crisis, which was an exception to the rule. In Nicaragua the United States could have intervened militarily without a response from the Soviet Union.

But vital stakes are not objective givens, as the concept of backyard may imply. They can also be asserted, in the way the United States did in Vietnam or the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Because that can only be done with military force, it raises the risk of escalation and calls for restraint. The created asymmetry of vital stakes here gave an advantage to the initiator: the Soviet reaction was more restrained, though the risk of nuclear escalation did make it impossible for the United States to invade North Vietnam, which therefore could not win the war. In these categories too, it is plausible that the number of confrontations would have been greater and less restrained without the risk of nuclear escalation.

In category D neither of the rivals had vital stakes, but could assert them in the course of a gradual or sudden involvement. The United States might have opposed more actively the Soviet-Cuban involvement in Southern Africa, undertaken in the aftermath of the war in Vietnam. But in general, the rivals were not inclined to go very far. The investments made in Ethiopia and Somalia, including the reversal of alliances, remained an exception. (The ruin of Somalia is in part the consequence of the US losing interest in it when it lost its function for the rivalry with the Soviet Union). Neither of the rivals had a vital stake in the Iraq-Iran war. And rather than attempting to increase its power in the region by openly supporting one of the two, they discussed already in 1983 the best way to react if the war would spill over or escalate. Crisis prevention again, instead of being blinded by rivalry.(Of course, both rivals agreed that Iran was the greater danger, which cleared the way for arms support to Iraq.)

Given the lack of clear demarcation of great power stakes in the Third World and its importance for making gains in their rivalry, the low incidence of direct confrontation and crisis situations between the rivals is remarkable. Wars remained limited, did in general not spill over (Cambodia was an exception). Straightforward and direct empirebuilding did not occur, only covert attempts to preserve allies, such as the coup against Allende. What would have happened if the fear of nuclear war would not have compelled the rivals to work out some - mostly implicit - regulating principles for their intense rivalry?

The bipolar world order thus resulted from the regulation of hegemonic rivalry made necessary by the imperative to avoid all crises or confrontations that implied the risk of nuclear escalation, intended or unintended. This did not exclude military intervention, but limited it by the rule that vital stakes of the adversary had to be respected.

It was a rudimentary order, leaving much to be desired. Conflicts were frozen rather than solved. Except in Western Europe and Japan both sides tolerated, if not encouraged, oppression and military rule, though more difficult to legitimize for the United States (as the famous distinction between autocratic and totalitarian states made clear). But the bipolar order did bring a high degree of stability and permitted, if not stimulated the rapid development of global interdependencies. Apart from the nuclear revolution, the old order owed much to the military and economic preponderance of the United States, providing it with the capacity for leadership, primarily in Western Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, but also in other parts of the world and in international organizations.

The potential of the bipolar world order for further development was demonstrated in the brief period that the US and the SU cooperated in the United Nations to solve a number of frozen regional conflicts, such as Afghanistan; Namibia; Angola; South-Africa; Cyprus; the Western Sahara and Cambodja - and, of course, in the Gulf operation. If the Soviet Union would have remained intact their cooperation could perhaps in the longer run have transformed the bipolar order into the original 'joint sheriffs' conception of the UN.

5. The future position of the United States

The bipolar order was based on rivalry and preponderance in their own prerseve of the two great nuclear powers. One of the two has disappeared. As the Soviet empire was surely not 'by invitation' it was experienced as a liberation. But it has not been replaced with a form of order based on consent, and will not be so in the foreseeable future. The violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, deterred before by the bipolar rivalry, may well foreshadow other such conflict

processes, especially because neither UN forces nor an ad hoc coalition of NATO members effectively intervened.

It appears more likely that Russia as successor state will be involved in future conflicts than that will be able help preventing or solving them. If so, it can only do so in cooperation with the US and Western Europe. But CSCE as a collective security institution is still very weak, to put it mildly.

What then about the American position? It has already been argued that American preponderance can not be turned into a real global hegemony. The reductions in nuclear arsenals now likely (START and beyond) will lead to much smaller assured destruction capabilities for the US and Russia. At the same time those of France and Britain will have become larger, and that of China too. The differences between them will no longer remain very important, especially if nuclear arsenals will no longer be 'modernized', that is technologically improved, which leads to the resumption of competition. The assured destruction capabilities of the five nuclear powers will then clearly have but one, though very important, function: common deterrence, meaning forced restraint and making war between the great powers impossible. This puts to an end the kind of hegemonic rivalry endemic in international politics of the past. The peaceful end of hegemonic rivalry between the US and the SU shows that such conditional optimism is justified.

If the Soviet Union had been defeated in a 'great war' as it would have happened in the past, the power gain for the United States would have been much and much larger than it is at present. Britain in 1815 and the United States in 1945 owed their preponderance and order functions to the outcome of a great war. Now the result of 'winning' does not seem to amount to much. What does a great power win when the fight just stops? Can mobilisation of military power resources continue if its purpose and justification are removed? How to define 'vital stakes' when the opponent has disappeared? And if there is no longer a rival to be opposed, how to justify any unilateral military intervention outside American borders? Can it now act unilaterally only when its own security is directly affected? And how to define national security when there is no clear adversary? Even if the US would have the capability to go it alone.

domestic politics would prevent its foreign policy moving in such a direction. Instead of flexing its muscles for global leadership the United States is looking inward.

A more important question to be asked about the future role of the United States is therefore: can the global and regional structures of cooperation based on American preponderance be maintained? (For an analytical framework, Keohane, 1984). The United States may indeed be 'bound to lead' (Nye, 1990), but it also has a tradition of shying away from that role. American passivity with respect to Yugoslavia and its refusal to assume at least some responsibility for Somalia are disturbing signs.

Reluctance to take the lead can not be attributed to decline of American power. There has been much discussion about the consequences of 'overstretch' imposed by the hegemonic rivalry (Kennedy, 1987). But it can also be argued that military-technological competition was beneficial to the US, if only as a tool for preventing recession (McNeill, 1990). Japan and Western Europe have indeed increased their economic power resources relative to the United States, but that dates already from the sixties onwards. Relative decline with respect to the past does not have to mean that American technological and economic preponderance has come to an end, nor that decline will continue (Strange, 1990). The debate about American power decline remains inconclusive (Luttwak and Bartley, 1992).

That is not difficult to explain. Power resources are difficult to compare or add up. Their relative weight changes. Some important ones are intangible. One often forgotten intangible power resource is position in a network of relations. That is very important to the US, because it still occupies a crucial 'balancing' position in Europe, the Middle East and East Asia (and though less so, also in South East Asia). Though these network positions owe their importance originally to the bipolar rivalry, they have not yet disappeared.

The United States can thus still enhance its power chances by assuming a leadership role in both global and regional institutions. Whether it will do so is uncertain. The end of bipolar rivalry has increased its policy options, so more specific predictions are impossible (Jervis, 1992).

Whether or not American power resources will continue to decline, it is most unlikely that a real challenger will present itself, actively threatening American power and influence, and forcing it into a new form of hegemonic rivalry. Even if China, Japan or Western Europe would acquire the necessary power resources - which is not on the horizon - the structure of both global interdependencies (including global and regional institutions) and global power balances (common deterrence) would probably deter such a venture. So the United States can remain the most powerful state in the world, though the world can not be said to have become unipolar or multipolar in the classical sense. The best example of the uncertainty produced by the changing structure of global power relations is the current discussion about the composition of the Security Council. In the original conception of the Security Council the permanent members had to be great powers, in view of their role in peace enforcement. It was no coincidence that only the five SC members became full-fledged nuclear powers. But now two criteria are used: representation and power (though not being a great power as defined before). The sheer economic power of Japan and Germany make them serious candidates, without adding representation as a criterion. On the contrary, they would add to the overrepresentation of the North. To remedy this the Secretary-General of the UN, and others too, has proposed that three or four states from the three continents of the South should be added. But representation is combined with power, so that regional powers like India, Brasil and Nigeria have been proposed. How difficult the application of these criteria is was shown by the recent bid for membership of Indonesia.

The uncertain meaning of 'great power' and the forced restraint following from the nuclear revolution also imply that theories of 'long cycles' can not offer guidance in the development of global power relations and order (For an overview of long cycle theories see Goldstein, 1988).

6. Global integration or disintegration

After 'great wars' in the past peace conferences (Utrecht, Vienna, Versailles, Jalta) usually established a new order, at first in the form of a new balance of power, but increasingly also in the form of international organizations and collective security arrangements, however

defective. But the peaceful ending of the bipolar rivalry did not allow for such a 'new world order'. New global or regional institutions could not be created, so existing institutions have to be used while being transformed. But that proves difficult. Even the EC as the most cohesive organization is under great stress now that the Maastricht attempt to move forward may fail.

Uncertainty is increasing. Many states have to reexamine the principles of their foreign policy. Many regional powers obtain increased freedom of manoeuvre and new power chances. Other states lose their anchor and have to ask themselves how to preserve their security and independence. In principle, everything is open, and new alignments are possible.

New developments can indeed be observed. Iran has revived its ambition of being a regional great power. Relations between India and the US are improving now that the Soviet Union has disappeared. ASEAN is beginning with the incorporation of Vietnam, and possibly Laos and Cambodja. The rapprochement between Russia and Japan has failed, which may have durable effects on the East Asian power balance. Turkey enters into special relations with Central Asian republics, in competition with Iran. Former 'neutrals' apply for EC membership, towards which many countries in Eastern Europe also look forward. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council extends to the Bering street. The nationalist and separatist movements having an easy sailing in the Eastern half of Europe may have a modeling role elsewhere. Conflict potential has increased. And this is only the beginning.

Having come this far, one may well give up. How to find some direction in the flux to which the world appears to be increasingly subjected? The main question and point of reference seems to me whether the world will move in the direction of integration or of disintegration. Will the gap between differentiation and integration be narrowed down? Can the development of global interdependencies continue under better auspices for democracy, economic and ecological development and respect for human rights? Will effective collective security arrangements, global as well as regional, be forged. Or are disintegrating states, civil wars with regional spill-over, struggles for regional hegemony and global disintegration more likely? Nobody can answer these questions, because the evidence is contradictory. Both collective security arrangements and

nationalism are ascending. In most parts of the world conflict and cooperation are in an uneasy balance.

7. Global power relations: possible directions of development

There is perhaps a way to bring some structure in the flux. Combining power and interdependence, the assumption can be made that the global power balance after the end of bipolar rivalry has become based on three core regions, leading in technological and economic development and actually or potentially in military power. This implies also that the relative weight of power resources - at least for the time being - has shifted towards technological development and its economic incorporation.

On the basis of the development of relations between these core regions - East Asia, North America and Western Europe - three kinds of world order could emerge. It should be clear that these are thought experiments rather than scenario's. They can, however, make the long term implications of different foreign policy options clearer.

The three possible world orders are the following:

1. The Triple Core World
2. The Trilateral World
3. The Integrating World

There is still a fourth, remote possibility of large scale (nuclear) war, implying disintegration to a much lower level of development. I have omitted, for reasons explained before, the 'single sheriff' world, in which the United States as hegemon would assume the role of pacifying the world all by itself.

The three core regions are both rivals and dependent upon each other. There is no longer a self-evident leader of the three, as the United States used to be in the past. Rivalry has become more pronounced and open. But all three are dependent on the smooth functioning of the global

economy and on cooperative conduct in case of recession. To increasingly structure their cooperation would clearly be in the long-term interest of all three, but then short-term interests and competition often prevail. The relation between Japan and the United States has become tenuous, with a rather crude nationalism having raised its head. Europe and the United States quarrel in GATT, while there are also disagreements over future security arrangements. Competition from Japan - seen as a real threat - was largely responsible for the integrative spurt of 'Europe 1992', though now relations between Japan and Europe are relatively tranquil. The North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) can best be seen as an attempt by the United States to strengthen its position in trilateral competition. There is no 'regional' equivalent in East Asia. Even the definition of the relevant region, is unclear. Probably mainly for political reasons, Japan has shied away from initiatives towards regional integration, though it does try to economically bind South East Asia to itself.

Whether rivalry or cooperation will characterize the trilateral relationship is still far from certain. On this question the three worlds are predicated:

1. The Triple Core World

Trade wars and deadlock in GATT, leading to monetary and financial disruption, prevent the development of cooperative regimes between the three core regions. They are forced to rely more on themselves and on regional markets and cooperation. The disintegrative dynamic becomes self-propelling and more and more tends to produce 'fortresses'. The EC is best suited for such a development. The idea of "Eurafrica" is taken up again and cooperation with (parts of) Eastern Europe intensified. Russia will most probably be kept outside. The United States will strengthen NAFTA, and attempt to widen it to Central and Latin America, and perhaps Australia and New Zealand. Japan will find it more difficult to develop something similar, while leaving China and Korea out. But getting China and Korea in may be as difficult. Still, given a strong trend to regional self-reliance in the other core regions, regionalism could also come about in East Asia. On the other hand, conflict between China (in league with Korea, and perhaps Russia)

and Japan is also possible. Global disintegration can strengthen centrifugal tendencies within regions as well.

Regionalism could at first lead to not much more than trade blocs or common markets. But it is unlikely that it would not also have political and security repercussions, leading to a break up of NATO and bringing the American role in East Asia to an end. The worst case would be that of three regional fortresses, becoming more and more closed to each other and their respective peripheries, engaged in continuous rivalry and 'cold war' propaganda to assure loyalty and political cohesion. This could end in belatedly resembling George Orwell's 1984, with the difference that each core region would possess its own exclusive periphery. Some important parts of the world would remain excluded, however, notably the Middle East, South West Asia and South Asia, and probably Russia. Would the three rivaling regions then follow Orwell's perspective and wage wars in the area 'open' to their competition? That no longer seems likely. The development of three 'fortresses' could also lead to a fourth core region, based perhaps on an alliance between India and Russia (or Russia and China).

This global disintegration perspective presupposes that it will not be possible to reconcile rivalry and cooperation. Though a '1984' seems farfetched, the threat of disintegration is real enough.

2. The Trilateral World

Global recession and political instabilities in many parts of the world make the three core regions realize how dependent they are on each other. They succeed by way of the G7 and OECD in developing joint monetary and economic policies to fight recession. Agreement in GATT heads off trade wars.

This lesson in the overriding importance of global interdependencies, together with the relative impotence of the UN-system, leads to a strong trilateral movement, somewhat similar to the European movement. Trilateral institutions are formed, not just in the economic and monetary

fields, but also in the form of an Atlantic-Pacific security arrangement. That brings Korea in. (Still, Japan's nearly exclusive position in the trilateral setting remains problematic).

Trilateral cooperation and power - and movement in the direction of a trilateral 'fortress' - lead to blocking the Security Council. In response the trilateral alliance may set up a multilateral mobile force under a single command to replace the UN if necessary. But it could also not go in at all for peace keeping or peace enforcement beyond its borders, because that would be too costly and there would not be public support for such a course. The role of the UN declines in any case. The trilateral tends to become a world sufficient to itself, making itself less and less dependent on the rest of the world and no longer having any strategic interest in controlling other parts of the world. 'Benign neglect' becomes the slogan defining its policy towards the South. How that would influence the South is difficult to project: new alliances and forms of cooperation or struggles for regional hegemony both seem to be possible. The trilateral world could lead to sharp polarization between North and South.

3. The United Nations World

The three core regions here also stick together and make productive use of existing institutions like the G7 and OECD. But they do not go further in developing trilateral institutions and separating themselves from the rest of the world. They realize that they cannot go it alone, having become irreversibly dependent on the state of global interdependencies. Their prosperity, their social, political and military security, and their ecological survival require more adequate global institutions to which any regionalism has to play second fiddle. Refugee and migration movements make clear that even the strongest states can no longer completely close themselves off.

From such a global view it follows that the UN-system will have to be strengthened and its functions expanded. The Security Council is expanded and reformed. The five permanent members give up their veto in exchange for a limited number of semi-permanent members (5 to 7 years) being added, so as not to harm the efficacy of the Council. A preventive UN

deployment force is formed, comprising a small standing nucleus with larger forces earmarked by member-states and available at short notice. The emphasis is on prevention, because UN-intervention after a war has broken out is not always feasible, especially if it is not a case of aggression in the sense of armed forces crossing a border. Regional security arrangements are more clearly and effectively linked to the UN-system.

Prevention - of impoverishment, inequality and violent conflict - is also the main consideration in other activities of the UN and other international institutions. The analogy with the development of the welfare state is taken more and more seriously. A form of global taxation is accepted, in some states leading to individual taxpayers footing the bill, implying some development of global identification. Human rights and democratic forms of government become more widely accepted - and put in practice. Global integration proceeds slowly but surely.

Three possible worlds, none of which appear that plausible. At present trends in all three directions can be observed, none of them as yet dominant. Though global interdependencies have become much more important than they were before, the three possible worlds show that a point of no return has not yet been reached. Will states be forced define their vital interests in a less narrow manner than in the past? Will they more clearly include a global perspective in their considerations?

What more can be said with some assurance? I doubt, whether the three core regions will split up completely. I also do not think that the three core regions will leave the rest of the world to their own fate, even though specific and competing military-strategic interests have disappeared. Strategic interests of the great powers are now defined, at least in principle, in terms of both territorial defense and collective security (including strengthening the role of the UN); of preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction; and of protecting themselves against any possible attack from the air (GPALS, which may become a tool of the North). The leaders of the three core regions will increasingly face the assertiveness of regional powers, such as Brasil, Argentina, Indonesia, India, China, Iran, Egypt, or Nigeria. Russia will probably also join this

category. Their power chances have certainly increased. But the implications of this are uncertain, and not uniform.

The combined force of global interdependencies and the nuclear revolution has to some extent changed the context of international politics. Great wars and the kind of hegemonic rivalry between great powers the past has been plagued with have become improbable, if not impossible. But war and civil war as such are still very much possible, perhaps even more so than during the period of the bipolar order. The world is in flux, so specific predictions about global power relations and order are impossible.

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