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The World of Transnational Threats

Achilles Zaluar

Richard Zeckhauser

Introduction

The immediate post-9.11.2001 moment offers a vantage point to survey the post-Cold War world. Our understanding of security threats must be redefined; strategic doctrines must be thought afresh. While the international order among states is quite strong, the world is not peaceful. Conflict seems persistent and intractable. Moreover, after a decade of complacency, we seem to be finally grasping the fact that we are fighting for survival under the shadow of catastrophic dangers.

The primary threats to international security have changed fundamentally. They no longer spring from territorial and ideological disputes among nation states, but from how globalization and technological advances have increased the ability of transnational criminal and terrorist networks to challenge nation states. We are witnessing the emergence of an “uncivil society” that may escape the control of the society of nations, and which constitutes a transnational threat to world governance.

The territorial order that emerged from World War II and the decolonization process is firmly established. With the exception of four flash points (the Middle East, Kashmir, the Korean Peninsula, and the Taiwan Strait), formal boundaries are secure. The outcome of the Gulf War made it even clearer that nations will have to stick to their current territories. The bans on wars of conquest and on the use of weapons of mass destruction complement each other and underpin interstate relations. Deterrence has worked to calm expansionism and, for the major powers in

* Edward S. Mason Fellow, 2002, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
** Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
particular, a deterred equilibrium has been reached. The new challenge for former enemies is to gradually go beyond deterrence and, after an intermediary stage of reciprocal reassurance, to establish partnership as the major organizing principle for their relations. Since the disappearance of the Communist bloc, all the major nations of the world, including Russia and China, have come into the international economic system. These major countries now perceive themselves as menaced primarily by common transnational threats, not by each other. These threats – organized crime and international terrorism chief among them – penetrate deep in our societies, and often cannot be deterred. The first part of this paper discusses why these threats have emerged.

The novel character of the new threats makes it difficult for decision-makers to incorporate them in their strategic assessments. President Bush’s inaugural address, for instance, emphasized the need to shape a traditional “balance of power.” The paper’s second part discusses heuristic biases that ensured that the paradigm of interstate conflict would remain prominent even beyond the 1990’s. The terrorist attacks of 9.11.2001, however, provided a systemic shock, drastically changing states’ perceptions of their interests and the threats to their security.

The principal argument of this paper – advanced in the third part – is that the appropriate strategies for dealing with threats from abroad must change dramatically. The pillars of containment and deterrence, which served us well for many years, are now diminished in importance. The new threats cannot be balanced. Instead, they will require aggressive engagement by many states in concert. Only global partnerships, often underpinned by a strong institutional framework, can bring governance to a globalized world. The figure below summarizes our argument.
The Expansion and Control of Transnational Threats

This figure shows the forces enhancing the power of transnational threats in recent years, and the measures that can be taken to contain them in the future. Transnational threats are like an evil genie that can not be put back in the bottle, and the forces of globalization and technological advance, which are critical to the well-being of the world, will remain stimulants in the future. Together, however, engagement and partnership can make these threats much less of a danger to the developed world.

1. Roots of Significant Transnational Threats

The closure of the process of decolonization (largely completed in the 1960’s) and the end of the ideological struggle between liberal democracy and communism (in 1989-91) removed the main remaining sources of enmity and aggression between states, except for the four important but limited territorial disputes mentioned above and discussed in the third section. Neither Russia nor China, nor any of the larger regional powers, has any compelling reason to quarrel with the West, although they may be wary of potential Western domination. Post-Gulf War sanctions against Iraq to enforce the legal norm against wars of aggression and annexation have served to strengthen world order.

Non-State Actors Powered by Globalization

The current “war on terrorism” provokes considerable controversy because it does not pit state against state. A coalition of states, led by the United States opposes a non-state actor (the
Al Qaeda transnational network) allied to an outlaw regime (the Taliban, which was generally not recognized as the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan), supported in part by criminal activity in the West. However, already during the Cold War, most conflicts opposed state and non-state actors. They were either “national liberation” conflicts in the context of decolonization, in which a colonial power opposed an independence movement, or “counter-insurgency” struggles in the context of the Cold War (and often both at the same time). The typical armed conflict usually opposed a small state allied with a great power against an insurgent movement receiving support from the other great power. Both great powers felt they had to have a horse in each major race and most minor races – so that complex conflicts were framed in Cold War terms, with numerous strange bedfellows in alliance, including the United States with the Mujahadeen fighters in Afghanistan, some of whom subsequently joined the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

If we leave out for a while the wars associated with the four flash points, we are left with a post-World War II list that consists almost exclusively of armed confrontations between state and non-state actors. For instance, what has been going on in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not a “civil war.” It is rather a part of the “Great Lakes War,” which may itself be regarded as an episode in a general “Central African War.” The latter is a series of interlocking conflicts that involve a number of states – the former Zaire, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, Burundi, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Congo-Brazzaville, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe – and a number of non-state actors – mining and oil companies, diamond-smuggling and arms-trafficking networks, and “private security” (or mercenary) firms, to mention only the major players.

Such non-state actors have grown in importance due to globalization. Globalization – the process through which global flows of people, money, goods, information, technology, and ideas become massive – has remarkably enhanced the productive capacity of the international
economy. The transfer abroad, including to emerging economies in the South, of the productive assets of the firms of advanced countries has created a powerful incentive for peaceful and stable relations among nations. At the same time, the imbalances created by the process of modernization have roused hostility among those who feel left out or trampled upon by an international system that is both pervasive and uncontrollable.

The major downsides of globalization are the empowerment of transnational criminal and terrorist networks, sometimes working together, on a scale that far exceeds the scope of any national police or military; the constant pressure of environmental degradation; and the increasing marginalization of huge chunks of the globe and large sectors of the world population, which find themselves unprepared to cope with financial volatility and competitive pressure.

Even as the sources of inter-state aggression fade, and the great and regional powers get closer to each other, new and more powerful sources of transnational threat are emerging: terrorism, crime, drug and weapons trafficking, money laundering, illegal immigration.

In this new environment, the lethal combination of international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction becomes possible and even likely. If the danger of Russian “loose nukes” is averted – and some close calls have been chronicled – the world will still be left with the inevitable diffusion of biotechnology, and with it the capability to manufacture enhanced pathogens that may be as deadly as nuclear weapons.

Other inherently transnational challenges have proven to surpass the capabilities of any individual state. Global warming and recurrent currency crises are well beyond the control of any single nation. Only the stronger and better organized among the emerging nations manage to keep pace with the globalized system. Colombia, for instance, potentially one of the richest and better educated societies in Latin America, cringes under the weight of terrorist insurgencies fed by illicit flows of drugs, weapons, and money. Russia, the precarious gatekeeper of nuclear and
biological weapons capabilities that could obliterate mankind, has been brought to its knees more than once by financial outflows that rapidly eroded its fiscal base. Smuggled diamonds from Sierra Leone have helped finance terrorism in the Middle East; illicit flows of diamonds and weapons helped fuel the Angolan war for a long time after the losing side had lost its former Cold War sponsors.

Without powerful state patrons, terrorist insurgencies increasingly turn to transnational crime to procure money and supplies. At the points where old and new sources of conflict converge – and in particular, although not only, in certain parts of the Islamic world – a witches’ brew of catastrophic proportions is boiling. Transnational criminal and terrorist networks, often blended together, comprise a nascent global “uncivil society,” in the expression coined by Kofi Annan. These networks are increasingly able to mobilize destructive capabilities on a par with those of most states, and thereby to challenge the safety and stability of the world.

In the more affluent societies, the opportunity to build worldwide free trade arrangements that could promote prosperity in poorer nations is hindered by the political tensions caused by the competition of cheaper manufactured and agricultural products from the South. In the absence of clear political leadership and compensatory measures for the social sectors that lose from global competition, protectionist lobbies have been increasingly able to drive a wedge between would-be trading partners.

The upside of globalization is prevented from compensating for the downside, and estrangement grows where partnership fails to materialize. Globalization is developing unmanageable elements. The weaker states – the ones that never fully completed the process of state formation – are the first to fall; and the vacuum they create – as in Somalia or Afghanistan – becomes a threat to even the most powerful. Every state now has a stake in the living conditions in every other state, and in its respect for the rule of law.
It is likely that during the past several decades, at some point in the process of globalization, the increase in system connectedness produced a qualitative change: the emergence of a radically new environment, one in which the power hierarchy between national and sub-national actors is being subverted. This change in the international system did not happen by design.

For example, new delivery systems for attacks abound. In 2001, for instance, approximately 72 million container units were moved around the world, accounting for 90% of world trade value; approximately 9 million arrived in the United States, of which only 2% were inspected. Most of the world merchant fleet that carries these containers flies flags of convenience with scarce or no supervision, and it seems Osama bin Laden was interested in covertly acquiring some of these ships himself or may have already acquired them. Under these conditions, why should a hostile force launch a missile in order to attack the United States with weapons of mass destruction, particularly since missiles carry return addresses and thus invite retaliation? The United States is now seeking cooperative arrangements with the countries where the main ports of transit reside in order to reduce the risk of a container-delivered mass-destruction attack.

A Moore’s Law for Destructive Capability

The new globalized environment has upset the relationship between capability and hostility. In the past, many states had an enormous capability to injure the United States, but either this capability was not matched with hostility (as with the United Kingdom and France) or it could be effectively deterred (as with the Soviet Union). Now there are subnational and transnational groups with significant grievances and hostile intentions, and they are harder to deter because of the lack of stable, asset-laden territorial bases. This lack of valuable territory, combined with the porous borders and heterogeneous populations of much of the developed world, means that these groups cannot be contained. Their members are difficult to recognize when they have penetrated Western societies. These groups have been empowered by the new environment, which gives
them the potential to bring enormous damage to any great power or state they decide to challenge.

There appears to be a version of Moore’s Law applicable to destructive capability. The original Moore’s Law predicted that the amount of information storable in a silicon chip would double every 18 months. Destructive capability also grows apace. In the 1950’s it took a major mobilization by a nation state to develop a weapon and delivery system capable of wiping out millions of lives; in a few years, a small subnational group with a few million dollars might be able to bring about similar devastation. The instrument of destruction could range from a nuclear weapon in a suitcase to a variety of enhanced biological agents, not to mention supercharged versions of some unforeseen attack in the spirit of 9.11.2001.

The entire international system of states that accept the basic tenets of international order – no wars of aggression, no support for terrorism, no proliferation of weapons of mass destruction – now faces a common threat, although certainly not a unified enemy. At the bottom is the issue of whether in the future national and international problems will be addressed through peaceful means – by the civil society of each nation, national political systems, and the regular functioning of the international system – or by uncivil, violent, and unpredictable acts of aggression and retaliation.

2. New Reality, Old Paradigm

As the Cold War drew to a close, scholars and analysts in the United States and abroad went to work analyzing the new reality and proposing new strategies. However, until recently the planning scenarios used by decision-makers have largely continued to be cast in the old mold. A considerable amount of brainpower and money went into trying to decide whether the new world configuration was unipolar or multipolar, and if unipolar, whether or not the United States should
set as its paramount goal preempting the rise of a competing power. Without a doubt, other great powers tried to devise plans to counter American “hegemony.” With the preeminence of American military power and the spread of American cultural influence, a counterproductive balancing reaction started to appear, including in the public opinion of some old allies.

There were some valuable initiatives during the past decade, such as the Russia-United States Cooperative Threat Reduction (Nunn-Lugar) Program and closer security dialogue between the United States and China. But without a coherent framework to guide decisions about the allocation of resources, these have been under-funded and downgraded as a priority. Until quite recently, the overall presumption was still one of competition – if not potential confrontation – with these states, as reflected in the gradual loss of consensus in the Security Council over Iraq and Kosovo. Until 9.11.2001, even as the new threats became evident, nations persisted in refusing to see the writing on the wall.

**Vested Interests, Agency Problems, and Heuristic Biases**

One reason why the old paradigm of interstate competition survived in fundamentally new circumstances may be that domestic constituencies for the cooperative programs are not nearly as powerful as those for competing priorities. The Nunn-Lugar program seeks to dismantle, in cooperation with the Russian government, nuclear weapons that were once targeted at the United States and its allies, and to facilitate the control of fissile material that could otherwise be diverted into the hands of terrorist groups or rogue states. It is hard to imagine a more effective way to use money to buy security benefits. Yet from time to time its funding has been threatened – in part because much of the money is being spent abroad and not domestically.

Principal-agent relationships provide a second explanation. Foreign policy is largely formulated by specialists (the agents) before being presented to the public and ultimately implemented by politicians. The public and politicians are principals whose interests should be
served. However, a disparity in knowledge allows the agents to make recommendations that maintain their privileged positions. Elected officials generally lack international experience and have to trust experts, whether inside or outside the government, to come up with their strategies and speeches on external relations. Many of their foreign policy experts built their careers during the Cold War. They speak French or Russian, not Farsi or Arabic. They know much about Czechoslovakia and her successor states but little about money laundering. They have little appreciation for Islamic culture and tend to judge it by a few recent negative and salient events. It would be personally threatening if it was suggested that their main area of expertise, interstate conflict, now should take a backseat in favor of dealing with transnational threats. Thus, movement to a new paradigm is impeded.

A third important reason security priorities have been slow to change may be found in the recent developments in cognitive psychology. Human beings, extensive studies show, do not make decisions based only on a rational calculation of benefits and costs that they estimated using all the available information. Rather, they use “bounded rationality,” and are unduly impressed by the circumstances that prevailed in past choices, even if these circumstances no longer fit newly acquired data. It is a bias that served mankind well in its evolutionary past, when changes in the environment accumulated slowly across several generations. However, it may be dangerous in a world where technological and political change is increasingly measured in weeks, not centuries.

Generals are often caught planning for the last war instead of the next threat. Similarly, decision-makers underestimated the probability of a terrorist attack such as 9.11.2001, while wildly overestimating the chances that the United States would, for instance, fight China in the twenty-first century. Well established, if unconscious, human decision heuristics are probably responsible for this unfortunate result.
The heuristics of representativeness, availability and anchoring – identified in a classic paper by psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky – are found sufficiently widely in decision making to be considered practically universal. The representativeness heuristic tells how people assess the likelihood that an observed process will lead to a possible future event. Humans tend to estimate this probability by the degree to which the event shares some of the most striking features of the process. For instance, the United States regards the regimes in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan as generally friendly, while Iran, Syria, and Libya are commonly considered hostile. The Al Qaeda organization, a transnational network whose main recruiting efforts were largely based in the former three states (where they are also fight existing regimes) and not the latter, was not representative of the general impression that the United States had of these countries. Afghanistan was viewed as a strategically marginal place, even though Al Qaeda was based there. Therefore, the threat from states considered either friendly or irrelevant was underestimated. Consider, for instance, how the United States would have reacted after the bombings of the East African embassies and the USS Cole if the source of the threat had been located in Iraq. Also, the scarcity of successful foreign terrorist attacks in the United States led some to discount heavily the probability that the next target would be located in American territory – even though there had been several attempts, including a nearly successful one against the World Trade Center itself in 1993. As the 2002 controversy about the FBI Minnesota office reveals, although many law enforcement and intelligence officers in the field seemed to have a more accurate appraisal of the threat than our national leaders, this knowledge did not move up the chain of command with urgency.

The availability heuristic describes the human tendency to assess the probability of an event by the ease with which instances can be brought to mind. For instance, contemporary Western defense establishments are structured to fight large-scale interstate war of the sort that threatened
civilization during World Wars I and II. The most immediately available instances of conflict are the sudden communist aggression in Korea, large-scale counter-insurgency warfare in Vietnam, the four decades of planning to counter a Soviet invasion of Europe, and the Iraqi push into Kuwait. With these mental images, it is extraordinarily difficult to adapt to a world in which the main threat may be related to a money-laundering network that is financing a small group of terrorists who are based in a strategically marginal and economically failed state and may be planning to acquire highly enriched uranium or biological containment facilities. The financial practices in our own countries – and in particular a longstanding unwillingness to question the legality and purpose of currency transfers – are more dangerous to us than a Russian assault division. But the new threat does not elicit immediate memories, so it seems abstract and unreal.

The anchoring heuristic identifies people’s tendency to anchor their assessments of the probability that some event will occur on their initial estimates, and to shift their assessments too little in response to new information. Experiments have shown that adjustments are typically insufficient, and therefore the initial estimate, no matter how uninformed it was, has an undue weight if compared to subsequent data. Therefore, people tend to overestimate the probability of conjunctive events, such as the completion in time of a large project that requires several discrete steps, because they anchor their assessment on the high probability that the first step will succeed, and fail to readjust it downwards enough to take account of the many other steps needed to complete the project. On the other hand, people tend to underestimate the probability of disjunctive events, such as failure in a power station lacking redundant systems that might be caused by any of a large number of small breakdowns, because they anchor their estimate in the low probability of the first possible failure, and do not readjust it upwards as much as needed to take account of the other possible causes of breakdown.
Such anchoring biases impinge on foreign policy assessments. For the United States ever to find itself in a situation in which it would have to go to war with China, many unlikely and unfortunate events would have to occur: it is a conjunctive event, and therefore people tend to overestimate its probability. But a catastrophic chemical or biological terrorist attack is disjunctive: it could result from any of many failures in surveillance or prevention, and could be launched using a great range of substances; people tend to underestimate its likelihood.

Systemic Shock

The 9.11.2001 attacks led to a new initial value in potential targets’ estimates of threat, and that is why it enables them to react more effectively. Our perception of transnational threats was slowly changing even before the event, but it was 9.11.2001 that allowed the world to stare at reality clearly for the first time in ten years. We now realize that changes in the international system had created an environment conducive to the emergence of new transnational threats. We now have a terrible image of the kind of damage that is possible. And our estimates of the probability of catastrophic destruction have been revised sharply upwards.

These changed perceptions made interstate conflict less likely, even among traditional adversaries, because they showed how the new transnational threats constitute a common though non-unified enemy, and created a confluence of interest. They even created incentives to address some of the remaining territorial conflicts that were being ignored. By changing the way decision-makers perceive the world, 9.11.2002 changed the world itself. It started a new dynamic that has become a major factor in international relations.

Like a giant magnetic field that suddenly changes the polarity of all metallic needles in its domain, the emerging transnational threat has the potential to align a previously conflictive system of states. Whether this is an enduring effect or not – and whether the international system rises to the challenge – will depend on a long series of foreign policy decisions. Human
decision-makers, unlike compass needles, react not only to the lodestone of an external environment, but also to their internal political, cultural, and psychological forces. They must process the systemic shock in their minds, use the opportunity to forge a new framework for a globalized world, and elaborate a viable strategy to deal with the challenges that are identified. Finally, given the many required decisions, this is a conjunctive event, hence less likely than we might hope.

3. From Containment and Deterrence to Partnership and Engagement

The Need for a New Grand Strategy

The thesis presented in the first part of this article – that the emerging transnational threats are more important than declining interstate conflicts for the future security of the world, and that civilized states have increasingly convergent interests as they must cooperate to contain global uncivil society and deter transnational threats – may not be immediately accepted, even after the events set in motion by 9.11.2001. To parties deeply engaged in one of the remaining territorial conflicts, for instance, the world must appear very different: the balance of power between expansion-prone states is probably the best model to understand their immediate circumstances. There is also the vexing problem of how to deal with states ruled by regimes that may have decided to throw their lot with transnational terrorism and crime – so-called “rogue states.”

We are certainly not suggesting that traditional military power is obsolete in contemporary international relations. Indeed, the “rogue states” (few as they are, and often quite weak), and the remaining territorial disputes are critical primarily because of their intersection with transnational problems, in particular international terrorism, international crime, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. For example, a biological weapons laboratory, a terrorist headquarters, or a drug smuggling network may set up shop in the most obscure corner
of the world and use modern telecommunications and transport technologies to quickly attain global reach.

Such inherently transnational threats can only be addressed by the concerted action of the international community as a whole. Cooperative relations between great and regional powers will have to be developed, and the support of all states, no matter how small, cultivated. "Rogue states" will have to be socialized back into the fold. Existing multilateral institutions will have to be reformed, strengthened, and possibly supplemented by new ones.

The required new grand strategy must be easily understandable and widely accepted. It should convince not only decision-makers in states – still the most important players in the international scene – but also other increasingly relevant actors in international organizations, non-governmental organizations, transnational companies, and the media. It would provide the society of states and our increasingly internationalized civil society with a road map for global governance – and a tool kit to contain and deter uncivil society.

Democracy and Sovereignty

The degree of cooperation among states that will be needed to address transnational threats will challenge some traditional concepts of sovereignty. Up to now, in spite of some small steps in cooperation, the police, judiciary, customs, immigration authorities, intelligence agencies, and financial supervisory bodies of each nation have pursued their activities in relative isolation from sister agencies in other nations. If major nations persist in this administrative autarky, transnational threats will overwhelm them.

A hint of the kind of mechanism that will be required in the future is contained in the 2000 Palermo International Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, signed by the United States but still pending ratification and implementation by the United States and other relevant
powers. Yet the most important ingredient will be a change of attitude. Certain practices that are accepted even in affluent societies will have to be curtailed: tolerance for tax havens and secret bank accounts; unaccountable trade practices verging on the criminal in fields such as diamonds trade and weapons trafficking; the bribing of authorities in weak states by transnational corporations; a culture of hypocrisy and leniency surrounding drugs; and unregulated experimentation with biotechnological advances with weapons potential. Looking to the South, the United States will have to engage in closer and more cooperative relations with states challenged by the illicit flow of drugs, weapons, smuggled goods such as cigarettes, and dirty money.

One important, positive fact is that liberal democracies are uniquely well situated to engage in this type of closer cooperative supervision while preserving the individual privacy and national autonomy needed to safeguard freedom and normal business. There will be an inevitable enlargement of the supervisory and enforcement role of the state, both at the national level and through international arrangements. Only an independent judiciary, a competitive political system, and a free press will be able to maintain adequate checks and balances on the growing power of the executive. Where these conditions are not present, political stability and economic growth will suffer. States that fail to democratize, or to nurture their democratic traditions, will have to choose between ever more strict repression or a failure to cope with transnational threats – and as a consequence they will lag behind.

No Strategically Marginal Areas

In this new world, even the most marginal areas may be of strategic value. Historically, what made a part of the world “strategic” was its significant resources, control of trade routes, or close proximity to relevant areas. Even a decade ago, the thought of Afghanistan as a major strategic
concern would have been laughable. Now, the primary concern with geographic areas is not about the resources they control, but the value and life that some of their residents can destroy in locales around the globe. Areas may be important exactly because they provide remote hiding places. This turns traditional logic in its head: proximity may be a disadvantage, and the absence of material wealth makes deterrence harder. Geographic proximity is secondary when weapons of mass destruction can be carried in suitcases and biological agents delivered through the mail. Virtually all the most successful societies are open, and air travel is ubiquitous and effectively anonymous. States and societies must not be allowed to fail, not only for moral reasons (although those should be enough), but also because the current degree of world connectedness requires the worldwide prevalence of the rule of law and the minimal degree of affluence and equity necessary to sustain an open, law-abiding society. The “development” paradigm of the past half-century is not working for at least the 56% of the population of “developing” countries that live on less than US $2 a day. A vast recruiting pool for crime and terrorism is being allowed to grow. Even if it is not poverty per se that breeds terrorism and organized crime (many terrorists and gang leaders seem to come from middle class backgrounds or higher), inequity, oppression, and its related grievances create a fertile ground in which terrorism and criminal networks recruit and hide. The norms that become rooted when a society becomes affluent and democratic, such as freedom of expression and the rule of law, tend to create conditions in which organized violence and hatred may be effectively limited, if not altogether eliminated.

Insufficiency of Traditional Security Principles

The traditional principles of containment and deterrence are overwhelmingly less effective against transnational threats than against states. It is not only that the cost of producing devastating weapons has diminished, but also that the advantages of using such weapons are
dramatically greater for transnational groups. The Soviet Union would have had to destroy the entire United States and much of Europe if it used nuclear weapons at all; otherwise, the West’s retaliation would have been devastating. Transnational groups, by contrast, might choose to hit one population center or two. Since such groups are rarely located at one central address and have limited physical assets, there is no single place at which they can be threatened with annihilation. Al Qaeda’s approach has been to have a big display attack on western targets at long intervals, years rather than months. When it does claim to retaliate, it is often for events that happened long before. Al Qaeda has not shown a propensity for minor bombings, and appears as much interested in impressing its supporters, potential supporters, and its appeasers as in terrorizing its targets.

Our usual ways of thinking may be confounding our strategy about how to deal with the new transnational threats. For example, why did Al Qaeda not strike again in retaliation, even as its leaders were running for their lives in Afghanistan? Is it because the organization had been disrupted by preventive and repressive measures? Or because remaining cells are kept under tight central control, to be used at a later date for another catastrophic attack? To assess Al Qaeda as we might assess past enemies would likely lead to wrong conclusions. The novelty of the threat makes it exceedingly hard to predict under which circumstances it could be effectively defeated.

**Engagement**

If transnational threats – be they drug cartels, terrorist networks or weapons traffickers – cannot be effectively deterred or contained, and are instead becoming increasingly empowered, the only strategy that can be effective against them is engagement. Engagement may sometimes take the form of military or police action, at others times clandestine activities. Often it will require severing international supply chains, say of weapons or monies, or cutting the tentacles
of human networks. And more complex strategies will be required to change the conditions in which terrorist and criminal groups thrive. Most often it will be a combination of such approaches, undertaken by a coalition of states. In Afghanistan, for instance, defeating the Taliban regime was a necessary but not sufficient step toward rendering that country inhospitable to international terrorism and drug trafficking. The hard task of “nation building” will have to be undertaken by the Afghans themselves, with massive support not only from the United States, but also from the United Nations, donor countries, and as many neighboring and regional states as possible.

It is no coincidence that two of the most serious security threats in the world, the Al Qaeda network and the insurgencies in Colombia – though nominally right- and left-wing groups – are linked to the two most important drug trafficking routes in the world. The former is dedicated to heroin and the latter to cocaine.

Engagement to defeat these threats can not be limited to military and intelligence responses. Rather it will require a complex strategy for rebuilding civil society and state institutions while involving regional partners and states that are affected by the drug traffic as consumers, producers, or transit routes. It surely will involve both local initiative and multilateral support. In cases of urgent necessity involving self-defense or massive violations of human rights, such as those in the Rwandan genocide, engagement may have to be decided unilaterally. But these should be the exception and not the norm, and should be followed up by diplomatic efforts to ensure general approval. In order to be effective in the long term, engagement in a globalized world will have to be anchored in a multilateral framework that provides legitimacy and widespread support. The appropriate modes of engagement, in terms of both international law and international acceptance, will evolve over time as threats manifest themselves and are confronted.
The new transnational issues will often need to be tackled on a global basis. No single state will have sufficient power – both magnitude and spread are important – or inclination to go around solving such hard problems by itself. Except in extreme emergencies, the grudging acceptance by other states of the single superpower’s unilateral initiatives will not be enough. The smaller states would likely shirk from their duties and let the larger state, or possibly states, take on a disproportionate burden for the provision of collective goods such as security. If this happens, such goods will be underprovided. Only strong institutions with a normative basis – that is, multilateral organizations and international law – could reduce the problems of gross disproportionality of burden and suboptimality in the provision of public goods such as security and financial stability. In the absence of a strong institutional framework, the answer of many states to transnational threats may be a form of buck passing or appeasement.

Multilateral engagement cannot be exclusively ad hoc. While individual nations often decide national policy according to circumstances, if all the civilized states in the world are to coordinate their actions, they need clear, consistent norms that provide easily identifiable focal points to guide states’ behavior. These norms are few in number and fair: No wars of aggression. No proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. No support for terrorism. No genocide. States will cooperate against common threats and participate in good faith in universal institutions. Divergent interests will be negotiated peacefully. Extreme poverty and lawlessness anywhere are a threat everywhere.

Simple as they are, these rules – affirmed through decades of work by the United Nations – do not stand a chance to prevail without the decisive support of the vast majority of states, led by a concert of great and regional powers, in particular the United States. This concert, acting in an institutional framework, is needed to deal with the hard problems caused by conflicting norms such as those invoked before the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo, when respect for human
rights and the peaceful settlement of disputes clashed. Achieving this concert is less a matter of resources than of will and vision. As the United States seeks the cooperation of all nations in the campaign against terrorism, it will increasingly recognize that the old debate between unilateralism and multilateralism poses false questions.

**Partnership**

The complex problem of relations among the larger powers cannot be simply wished way. The relations between the major players in the system – the United States, Europe, China, Japan, Russia – as well as the larger regional powers – India, Brazil, South Africa, and others – could determine the success or failure of engagement. These states and other members of the system have strong common purposes, which must define the coming years, and some divergent interests, which must not interfere with the joint pursuit of their common purposes. There is a parallel with how the common purpose of avoiding nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States defined the second half of the twentieth century despite these states’ divergent interests. The major states could either prevent or ensure the implementation of effective cooperative policies, depending upon whether their relations are dominated by trust, rivalry, or hostility. In their relations with each other, these nations will be walking on eggshells. If deterrence is no longer to be the main organizing principle in some of these relationships, and if a security community – like the one that links the United States with Europe and Japan – has not yet been achieved among all, it is necessary to work toward a full-fledged partnership among the major and regional powers. This would mean a shared recognition among decision-makers and public opinion that the common purpose among them – controlling and defeating transnational threats – outweighs their divergent interests. The latter would be negotiated and dealt with through institutional channels.
Like any private partnership, a partnership among nations will work better if it is established across several areas. Besides security, foreign policy, and fighting terrorism, the major and regional powers have significant compatible interests in areas such as the regulation of international trade and financial flows. Human connections among societies – such as those that prevail in the transatlantic area – help anchor partnership in public opinion and render it resistant to the whims of government.

The transition from deterrence, through reassurance, to partnership may be complicated by many political and diplomatic issues. In the case of relations with Russia, for instance, intermediate steps such as the NATO-Russia Council established by the 2002 Rome Declaration are probably necessary. But the proposed endgame – full-fledged partnership, including, barring catastrophic developments, Russian membership in NATO – will eventually have to be made clear. The mere informal statement of this goal, through anticipation, would change the strategic relationship.

Equal care and attention should be given to developing closer security links between China and its critical foursome: the United States, Japan, Russia, and India. If China is treated as a full partner, it may provide essential help to settle tense situations, such as those in the Korean Peninsula and in Kashmir. As regards Taiwan, Beijing is aware that the way to solve this problem is for Chinese society to become so attractive and affluent that Taiwan will voluntarily fly the Chinese flag, while preserving far more autonomy than Hong Kong.

A closer understanding among the major powers and a great deal of leadership by the United States is essential to deal with the problem of the relations between Islamic and Arab states and the world. For a number of reasons, not the least of which is a feeling of being on the losing side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in Kashmir, Islamic states are having a particularly hard time adapting to the challenges of modernity. There is a dangerous feeling of humiliation
associated with the comparison between past glories and present circumstances. Concentrated, creative work under top-level leadership will be needed to address the remaining territorial issues and devise solutions that are generally accepted by Islamic nations and their neighbors Israel and India. Islamic societies will then have to undertake a process of political and social evolution that will allow them to recover their lost prominence in the advancement of world civilization.

Rogue States

The earth-shaking events of 9.11.2001 highlight the particularly troubling problem of the so-called rogue states: states ruled by regimes that refuse to abide by international norms of conduct related to terrorism, international crime, and weapons proliferation. The principles of deterrence and containment still apply to them – but the ultimate goal is not the obliteration of a given state, or even of a disagreeable regime. The costs of dealing with rogue states using drastic methods – for instance, invasion to overthrow and replace a regime – must be measured in all dimensions (military, moral, legal, political, the hostility of others) and may in most cases be too high. What worked well against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan may not be a generally applicable recipe, particularly if there is not a salient attack that precipitates the action. The real goal is the socialization of these states into the international community and into the rule of international law. As 9.11.2001 transformed the relationship between the Russia and the United States, it is possible that some of these states are also looking for new relationships and are willing to reform their ways.

The United Nations and other global multilateral institutions may play an important role in the process of socialization of rogue states, even while the states are being deterred by the United States and its allies. With rogue states, we are not trying to deter a devastating first strike, as with the former Soviet Union, but rather to keep them from feeling that they need to deter an
attack in the context of an asymmetrical relationship, one where the United States and her allies enjoy overwhelming military superiority.

The current Iraqi regime presents today’s most vexing problem. As this article is being written, Saddam’s regime persists. It has shown a propensity to reckless aggression by attacking Iran (with the tacit encouragement of Western powers) and then Kuwait, and also by committing genocide against sectors of the rural Kurdish population. The danger now is not that it would start a new war of aggression – it is too weak for that – but that it could provide weapons of mass destruction, in particular biological weapons, to terrorist groups. Alternatively, it could employ such weapons in the manner of a terrorist group, and bask in the protective rays of deniability. Even a credible threat that it might take such actions would be devastating. Furthermore, were the Iraqi regime to acquire certain types of new biological agents, it would come close to possessing an effective deterrent against the West, significantly upsetting the strategic balance in the Middle East. Beyond these threats, simply by staying in power the regime prevents Iraq from becoming the beacon of prosperity and stability in the Middle East that its natural resources would allow it to be in normal circumstances.

The quandary for the United States is that, if it goes to war against the Iraqi regime without widespread support and multilateral legitimacy (which it had when it proceeded to unseat the Taliban), it risks creating counterproductive consequences in the Arab world and elsewhere. On the other hand, if it waits, it could be allowing a determined enemy to become too strong. The only solution to this dilemma is to build an effective coalition of nations. Multilateralism is not the hindrance that certain rightists allege. It significantly reduces the costs of even highly appropriate actions.
4. New and Old Strategic Principles

In prosecuting the current war on terrorism, the defense and foreign policy establishments of the United States and many other countries turned on a dime, adopting military and diplomatic initiatives that were previously regarded as impossible. But the supporting strategic thinking is not yet fully developed; the theories developed over generations to deal with traditional threats do not apply. A new global coalition must now face the challenge of managing the complex international environment forged by globalization, at the same time overcoming transnational networks of terrorist and criminal groups. This coalition may never be fully formalized: most likely it will be composed of several overlapping alliances, formal in some cases and informal in others, embedded into strong and legitimate institutions with universal character. Looking further ahead than Al Qaeda, the emergent transnational threat is an international environment that can hardly be managed according to current strategic principles, and the terrorist and criminal groups that prosper in this environment of disarray. The enemies appear as networks affiliated primarily by a common purpose; they constitute an uncivil society that may escape the control of the society of nations and become particularly dangerous when connected with remaining territorial disputes and with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The principles that served us well in the previous era, containment and deterrence, are no longer sufficient in a world where the major threats are the growing capabilities of terrorist and criminal transnational networks, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the conditions that favor these perverse trends. Containment and deterrence are no longer central regulators of the relations between the major and regional powers, much less between these powers and most small states. And since transnational networks cannot be effectively deterred, and must be excised from the environment through effective engagement, containment and deterrence are not applicable there either. At best they retain a residual usefulness in relations
with rogue states before they are fully incorporated into international society, and in stabilizing
remaining territorial disputes before they are definitively settled.

We assert that the crucial strategic principles for a globalized world, one in which territorial
disputes are few and ideological differences are fading, are partnership and engagement. Major
powers and all civilized states – those that abide by international norms – will partner with each
other, engage with and defeat common transnational threats, prod rogue states back into the
common fold, help societies rebuild failed or failing states, rationally safeguard the natural
environment, and manage the globalized international system through generally accepted
institutions and norms. It is a challenge of major proportions, but if it is met the rewards make it
worth the effort: an enlarged community of affluent and secure democracies that by the end of
the century should encompass most, if not all, of humankind.