

After Iraq: Stanley Hoffmann and the Role of the United States in the International System

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Abstract

The article analyzes Stanley Hoffmann's view on US foreign policy in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and especially on the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003. It is based on his books, including his earlier ones, *Gulliver's Troubles*, *Janus and Minerva*, and *Duties Beyond Borders*, and on the essays he published in the *New York Review of Books* from 2001 until 2006. Hoffmann's analysis represents a powerful example of how "unfinished" the debate on American foreign policy is and will probably always be.

Keywords: Stanley Hoffmann; Iraq; September 11

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1 World Disorder and International Terrorism: the Aftermath of September 11

The attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and United Airlines Flight 93 that crashed in Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001, represented both the cause and the symptom of a trembling world order. They also dramatically changed the US administration's approach to foreign policy, shifting it from what can be described as "minimal unilateralism" to "maximalist unilateralism."¹ Some of the members of the then-ruling Bush administration advocated the need for a military effort to fight the "war on terror," which eventually translated into the launch of the war against Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003).

In the long run, the consequences of the attacks led to neither a redefinition of the international order nor the definitive affirmation of a new American exceptionalism.² Nonetheless, the shock suffered by the US and the enduring perception of a terrorist threat forced the nation to rethink and redefine its role in the world arena,³ stimulating international relations experts to refine their analyses.

September 11 raised many questions, but the most urgent one to answer was what reaction would be the most appropriate. Later in 2001, President Bush chose to declare war against the country said to be responsible for training, financing, and giving shelter to terrorist groups: Afghanistan. Iraq, officially attacked for detaining forbidden weapons of mass destruction, was invaded two years later. While the intervention in Afghanistan was generally supported on both a national and international level, the path that led to war against Iraq was much more controversial and debated. Journalists, scholars, politicians, experts, and public opinion all over the world joined a huge discussion that focused on the very legitimacy of the intervention, which ultimately proved to be a strategic failure for regional (and world) stability.

It goes beyond the scope of this article to provide an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the opinions that emerged from the debate. The smaller goal here is to shed light on the contribution of one of its voices, that of Stanley Hoffmann, a great intellectual, a "scholar-teacher"⁴ who immediately spoke out against the conflict. Nonetheless, a very brief overview of the discussion is necessary to this goal.

The invasion of Iraq was not a self-evident consequence of September 11. That decision was inspired by a group of intellectuals and policy makers, the so-called neoconservatives, whose ideas succeeded in obtaining the support of the president, Congress, and—at least in the initial phase— public opinion.⁵ Neocons had been advocating a strategy to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime since the 1990s. Their campaign, battled through articles and books, eventually scored a point on October 31, 1998, when the US Congress passed, and President Bill Clinton (1996–2001) signed the Iraq Liberation Act. The Act did not have immediate consequences, so much so that the Iraqi regime change was not even a priority when the Bush Jr. administration took office. Nonetheless, when September 11 occurred, neoconservatives had the opportunity to revitalize their ideas and elaborate a comprehensive and aggressive strategy of "war on terror."⁶ They were not the only supporters of this ap-

¹ See Mario Del Pero, "Present at the Destruction? George Bush, the Neoconservatives and the Traditions of U.S. Foreign Policy," *RSA Journal*, Vol. 13, (2005): 81–106.

² See John G. Ikenberry, *Liberal Hegemony and Imperial Ambition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006) and Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³ See Raffaella Baritono and Elisabetta Vezzosi, eds., *Oltre il secolo americano? Gli Stati Uniti prima e dopo l'11 settembre* (Roma: Carocci, 2011).

⁴ James Shield, "Stanley Hoffmann: A Political Life," *French Politics*, 7:3/4 (September 1, 2009): 363.

⁵ Neoconservatives were not the majority of the Bush cabinet members. On the contrary, realists like Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice were in much more influential positions. See Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound. The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003); James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (London: Viking, 2004); Max Boot, "George W. Bush: The 'W' Stands for Woodrow," *The Wall Street Journal* (July 1, 2002), reprinted in Justin Vaïsse and Pierre Hassner, *Washington et le monde. Dilemme d'une superpuissance* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2003), 30–2.

⁶ Justin Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism. The Biography of a Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 249–50. On neo-conservatives, see also Mario Del Pero, *Henry Kissinger e l'ascesa dei neoconservatori. Alle origini della politica estera americana*

proach, as the so-called neoliberals, or “liberal hawks,” stood with them in backing the necessity of war against Saddam’s regime. Paul Berman, member of the editorial board of *Dissent* magazine, published the book *Terror and Liberalism* about Islamist and Ba’athist ideologies.⁷ George Packer published *The Fight Is for Democracy*, arguing that Islamism was a new version of twentieth-century totalitarianisms.⁸ Christopher Hitchens, a former Socialist, joined several public debates defending the war against “Islamofascism”: in 2005 he reiterated why the fall of Saddam’s regime was a successful, and inevitable, initiative.⁹ Their argument drew on liberal-humanitarian grounds. Overthrowing Saddam’s regime was a necessary step towards achieving the American mission in the world, which included exporting democracy and defending liberal values whenever and wherever they were under attack.

Opponents to the war were also a composite group. Along with the large-scale mobilization of public opinion, politicians, diplomats, military commanders, and intellectuals also spoke out against the war.¹⁰ Left-wing intellectuals who opposed US intervention included renowned public figures such as Noam Chomsky, Gore Vidal, and the editor of the *New Left Review*, the British-Pakistani journalist Tariq Ali.¹¹ A number of liberals also raised concerns about the legitimacy and the potentially negative consequences of Bush’s “war on terror”: one of them was Stanley Hoffmann.

Born in Vienna in 1928, he acquired French citizenship in 1947. He taught at the Institut d’Etudes Politiques in Paris and at Harvard University in the US, where he cofounded the Center for European Studies in 1968. Unlike his “class of 1953” colleagues, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Samuel Huntington, Hoffmann never had a political role, either as a protagonist or as an adviser. This peculiar position allowed him to freely criticize the policies adopted by the various US administrations in office during his lifetime.

Politically a Gaullist, he was close to the American liberal culture, but he also studied, admired, and criticized the thought of realists such as Hans Morgenthau and especially Raymond Aron.¹²

This passage, an excerpt from one of the essays collected in the book *Janus and Minerva: Essays in Theory and Practice of International Relations*, can help explain his view on the discipline: “When I came in this country [the United States] as a student, I discovered not only an effort to turn the study of international affairs into a discipline, detached from the traditional approaches of international law and diplomatic history, but also a noisy battle between ‘realists’ and ‘idealists.’”¹³ He thought that both fronts were right on some points: realists were correct in stressing the basic anarchy of the international system, while idealists were right in rejecting the idea of the conflicting nature of the relationship between states. Hoffmann thought of himself as part of a group inspired by the myth of Sisyphus¹⁴ and looked for ways to fit liberal values into a system that (as realists said) tended towards destruction and chaos.¹⁵

(Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2005).

⁷ Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

⁸ George Packerm, ed., *The Fight is For Democracy: Winning the War of Ideas in America and the World* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003).

⁹ Christopher Hitchens, “The Case for Regime Change,” in *A Matter of Principle. Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq*, ed. Thomas Cushman (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 30. See also Mary Ryan, “Intellectuals and the War on Terror,” *Journal of American Studies*, 44:1 (February 2010): 203–9; Tony Judt, “Bush’s Useful Idiots,” *London Review of Books*, 28:18 (September 2006) and George Packer, “The Liberal Quandary Over Iraq,” *New York Times Magazine* (December 8, 2002).

¹⁰ Thomas E. Rick, “Some Top Military Brass Favor Status Quo in Iraq,” *Washington Post* (July 28, 2002), accessed October 11, 2017, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A10749-2002Jul27.html>.

¹¹ See Milan Rai and Noam Chomsky, *War Plan Iraq. Ten Reasons Against War on Iraq* (London: Verso, 2002) and “Tariq Ali vs. Christopher Hitchens on the Occupation of Iraq: Postponed Liberation or Recolonisation?,” *Democracy Now* (December 4, 2003), accessed October 11, 2017, https://www.democracynow.org/2003/12/4/tariq_ali_vs_christopher_hitchens_on_and_gore_vidal_dreaming_war_blood_for_oil_and_the_bush_cheney_junta (New York: Nation Books, 2003).

¹² For a short biography see Martin Griffiths, *Fifty Thinkers in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1999), 85–9.

¹³ Stanley Hoffmann, *Janus and Minerva. Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Relations* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 394.

¹⁴ Hoffmann was an admirer of Albert Camus, whom he often quotes.

¹⁵ Hoffmann, *Janus and Minerva*, 395.

His intellectual production is complex and intriguing. As Martin Griffiths wrote, some of Hoffmann's volumes "are required reading for any serious student of international relations."¹⁶

A European intellectual who moved to the United States, Hoffmann commented, discussed, and criticized the Bush Jr. administration's decisions and became one of the most distinguished voices in a debate that involved many observers on both sides of the Atlantic. His analysis on the war in Iraq of 2003 testifies to the extent to which that war affected the intellectual community. At the same time, his views suggest that he was redefining the "lens" he had used to look at the world until then. In such a reappraisal, he certainly provided numerous insights into the general theory of international relations.

This article aims at contributing—without claiming to be exhaustive—to the study of Hoffmann's thought, strangely little known to the European public outside France. It will be limited to his analyses of the global effects of the September 11 attacks and the decision of the Bush administration to bring the US to war against Iraq. What new scenario did that war open? Which role should the American superpower play in a world characterized by disorder and chaos? Which alternatives did the United States have to maintain its position as guarantor of the international system?

Hoffmann's answers to these questions provide a powerful and convincing example of how "unfinished" the debate on American foreign policy is bound to be. Contemporary commentators of events will always be divided into supporters and critics of the administrations' choices, political scientists will try to explain and sometimes influence them, and historians will underscore the changes and continuities of political decisions. If this is generally true, it becomes particularly evident when it comes to deciding whether or not to bring the country to war. In the case of Iraq, the consequences of the conflict are still being debated today, so much so that they even became one of the matters of discussion during the 2016 presidential campaign.

As time went by, many regretted their support of the war and others their weakness in opposing it, including *The New York Times*, famously regretting that "a number of instances of coverage ... was not as rigorous as it should have been."¹⁷

Hoffmann certainly did not have the same influence on public opinion as *The Times* did, nor was he the most famous public intellectual in the United States during the debate on Iraq, but he did oppose the war from the very beginning. Leaning on liberal traditional grounds, he advocated that the most effective response to terrorism would be a multilateral operation put in place by means of police and intelligence, and that it would involve the United Nations.

2 Reflections on the "War on Terror": A "Clash of Globalizations"?

Stanley Hoffman published the article entitled "The US at War" in *The New York Review of Books* in the November 1, 2001 issue, referring to the "war on terror" launched by Bush during his discourse in front of a joint session of Congress on September 20. The article was written on October 3, before the operations in Afghanistan began. Ultimately, Hoffmann wrote, the attacks demonstrated that "a small number of well-organized conspirators could cause thousands of victims in the territory of the 'only superpower.'"¹⁸ He was certainly not the only one to notice it. Nonetheless, he offered an original interpretation of the "well-organized conspirators" features. While Bush did not hesitate to describe the events as a "clash of civilizations,"¹⁹ borrowing the concept from Samuel Huntington's famous book, Hoffmann had a different interpretation.

He had often underscored the importance for international relation experts to shift the focus from the international system to its single parts and from state to non-state actors.²⁰ In *World Disorders*, he

¹⁶ Ibid., 88.

¹⁷ From the editors: "The Times and Iraq," *The New York Times* (May 26, 2004).

¹⁸ Stanley Hoffmann, "On the War," *The New York Review of Books*, XLVIII:17 (November 1, 2001):5.

¹⁹ George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation on the War on Terror," September 11, 2006, The American Presidency Project, accessed October 13, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=73962>.

²⁰ Hoffmann, *Janus and Minerva*, 124.

maintained that international balances and unbalances are determined by a variety of actors, including private groups and individuals.²¹ He also warned that, despite the triumphalist pictures that emerged at the end of the Cold War, history was demonstrating that the collapse of the Soviet bloc did not lead the international system towards a liberal, unipolar, tension-free order in which a unique paradigm of modernization triumphed and remained unchallenged.²²

The opposite was true: the emergence of new states, previously members of the Eastern Bloc, and growing economic interdependence not only led to a barely manageable diffusion of power, but also reignited ethnic conflicts within the single nations, potentially menacing global stability. Despite drawing attention to non-state actors and the dangers caused by the diffusion of power, Hoffmann never explicitly mentioned the creation of a “network of terror” as the most challenging problem to the international order before September 11. This is not to say that his analysis was misplaced or incoherent. When the attacks occurred, he extensively investigated the phenomenon of transnational terrorism, and he proposed to take action on its causes in a comprehensive but perhaps overly idealistic way. Dealing with one problem, he thought in other words, could not lead to forgetting another one.

One year after the attacks took place, in 2002 the Harvard political scientist offered his explanation of events in *Foreign Affairs*. September 11, he pointed out, shed light on the dual nature of international civil society. Along with positive effects, the “democratization” of means of communication also led to negative consequences. “Globalization makes an awful form of violence easily accessible to hopeless fanatics. Terrorism is the bloody link between interstate relations and global security.”²³ According to Hoffmann, then, international terrorism could be interpreted as a negative consequence of globalization, a point raised in different ways by other scholars.²⁴ In his view, there were three different levels of globalization, each one with its critical issues: the first level was that of economic globalization, the main actors of which were firms, investors, banks and (partly) states, and international organizations. Economic globalization led to the overdeveloped kind of capitalism “ironically foreseen by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels [which] poses a central dilemma between efficiency and fairness.”²⁵ Then, there was the cultural level of globalization, often identified with the process of Americanization, which resulted from the technological revolution and economic interdependence. Last, there was the political level of globalization, which was a product of the other two. It consisted in the global influence of American decisions on the rest of the world, and in the creation of international and regional institutions to solve global crises. The political dimension of globalization raised two problems: decision makers often lacked “democratic accountability,” and supranational organizations, like the United Nations, were too weak and too slow to be effective.

Hoffmann stressed that the three levels of globalization had the common effect of creating or increasing inequality among peoples. He highlighted that those who remained excluded from the benefits of the world system could ultimately take refuge in the ideological and fundamentalist roots of their culture, eventually joining terrorist groups.²⁶

After September 11, the most urgent political dilemma was how to deal with transnational terror-

²¹ Stanley Hoffmann, *World Disorders. Troubled Peace in the Post-Cold War Era* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998). See also Carlo M. Santoro, Introduction to *Il dilemma americano: la politica estera degli USA dalla guerra fredda alle sfide degli anni '80*, by Stanley Hoffmann (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1978).

²² Such was the famous interpretation offered by Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

²³ Stanley Hoffmann, “Clash of Globalizations,” *Foreign Affairs*, 81 (2002): 104; see also Joseph Nye, “U.S. Power and Strategy after Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs*, 82, (2003).

²⁴ For two different aspects of globalization, see for example Nial Ferguson, *Clashing Civilizations or Mad Mullahs: the United States Between Informal and Formal Empire*, in *The Age of Terror. America and the World After September 11*, eds. Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda (Oxford: Perseus Press, 2001), 115–41; and Odd Arne Westad, *Faulty Learning and Flawed Policy in Afghanistan and Iraq*, in *In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy after the Berlin Wall and 9/11*, eds. Melvin P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 150–62. Ferguson focuses on the economic effect of globalization within states, while Westad draws attention on the disparity between world’s regions.

²⁵ Hoffmann, “Clash of Globalizations,” 107.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

ism. The traditional ways to attack and defend the integrity of the states could be ineffective or even worsen the already chaotic state of world affairs. On one side, a traditional war against a non-state actor could have unexpected consequences. On the other, defensive countermeasures at a domestic level, consisting in reducing people's mobility and slowing down financial flows, risked boosting inequalities and creating further conditions for radical ideologies. An adequate response to terrorism was therefore neither an easy nor a fast task. It implied an active and responsible role of the US, a long-term strategy for resolving the Middle-Eastern conflict and lowering the costs of globalization. It also implied that the US should seek multilateral cooperation, leaving behind nationalist beliefs. American policy makers were warned, "Washington has yet to understand that nothing is more dangerous for a hyper-power than the temptation of unilateralism."²⁷

3 Towards War in Iraq: A Renewed Exceptionalism

On September 14, the US Congress passed a law that authorized the use of force against states that supported Al Qaeda terrorist network. The first target of the United States was Afghanistan, where the Taliban had their training camps. The military operations started on October 7, with the help of the United Kingdom. The operation soon obtained the formal authorization of both the UN and NATO.

The war against Iraq was declared in a very different legal framework, as the US Senate approved the military intervention in the country, with a majority of seventy-seven senators out of one hundred, but the UN did not give the US government the support it was looking for.²⁸

The Bush administration responded to terrorism with the doctrine delineated in a document, the National Security Strategy of the United States of America, published in September 2002. The novelty of the "Bush doctrine" was the theoretical justification of "preemptive war."²⁹ "We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten us or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends."³⁰

According to Hoffmann, the document expressed the tendency towards a renewed exceptionalism that was spreading both within the intellectual and the political community.

In the volume *Chaos and Violence*, he thus analyzed the roots of contemporary hyper-nationalist trends in US foreign policy. While the Republican president was inclined towards unilateralism even before September, 11 (as suggested by the withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol on climate change and the refusal to accept the International Criminal Court), the attacks on US soil provided the justification to relaunch a comprehensively unilateral political strategy. As previously recalled, that strategy was based on the ideas of a group of thinkers, whom Hoffmann labeled neo-exceptionalists and divided into three groups, namely, "the sheriffs who see the world through the epic of High Noon with the eyes of Carl Schmitt," the cold-warriors who accused Kissinger of being too moderate; the imperialists who thought that the United States was morally legitimized to act in the world according to its models; and those who were mainly concerned with the effects of Washington's policies on Israel's interests: among them were Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, and Douglas Feith.³¹

These three groups concurred in the elaboration of the National Security Strategy of 2002 (NSS 2002), which defended the notion of preemptive war, according to which, the (supposed) fact that the regime of Saddam Hussein held weapons of mass destruction (WMD) was enough to declare war against Iraq for the purpose of overthrowing his regime. Vaguely inspired by a "Wilsonianism in boots,"³² as Pierre Hassner defined it, and characterized by moralizing and imperial tones, application

²⁷ Ibid., 113.

²⁸ Mario Del Pero, *La politica estera prima e dopo l'11 settembre*, in *Oltre il secolo americano*, eds. Baritono and Vezzosi, 113–15.

²⁹ On Bush's interpretation of "preemptive war" see Tony Judt, "The Way We Live Now," *The New York Review of Books* (March 27, 2003).

³⁰ U.S. National Security Strategy 2002, 16, accessed June 4, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>.

³¹ Hoffmann, *Chaos and Violence*, 121.

³² Pierre Hassner, "The United States: The Empire of Force or the Force of Empire?," *Chaillot Papers*, 54 (September 2002): 43.

of the NSS 2002 would face two main obstacles in Hoffmann's opinion: "one is the world itself, and the other one is US public."³³

The first obstacle, "the world itself," represents a recurrent theme of Hoffmann's intellectual production, i.e., experts and policy makers should examine things the way they are, not the way they want them to be.³⁴

The American public would prove to be an obstacle for Washington's foreign policy only a few years later. In 2008, according to polls, 54% of adults thought that the intervention in Iraq was wrong and only 36% of the people interviewed thought that the war was the right decision.³⁵ Generally speaking, the opinion of the American people on the Iraqi conflict seems to have changed from 2005, as the polling institute Gallup underscored.³⁶ Initially, 72% of Americans supported President Bush's actions.³⁷

Why did US public opinion support the war in 2003? Responding to the French historian Frédéric Bozo, Hoffmann pointed out that Bush had been good at "selling the war" as the right choice to liberate the Iraqi people and as a necessary way to defend American national interests. He also added a harsh critique of American journalists, who, in his view, fully and uncritically joined the war rhetoric. "In the United States supporting the troops meant supporting the war."³⁸ This is not entirely true, as Hoffmann himself admitted later on, noting that there were some critical voices who spoke against the war, but they were too isolated and too weak.³⁹

4 Was Intervention Right?

The war in Iraq raised severe legal concerns. A firm supporter of international law, Hoffmann thought that the UN was the main actor in charge of defending world peace and that states could only exceptionally act on their own.⁴⁰ Intervention is legitimate, he thought, when there are "massive violations of human rights, which would encompass genocide, ethnic cleansing, brutal and large-scale repression to force a population into submission, including deliberate policies of barbarism, as well as the kinds of famines, massive breakdowns of law and order, epidemics and flights of refugees that occur when a failed state collapsed" or when a democratically elected government is fighting against an anti-democratic rebellion or when a regime is inflicting "mass and systematic suffering" on its people.⁴¹

When Bush announced the military way against Iraq, he commented, "There is no room in the U.N. Charter for the president's doctrine of pre-emption, for anticipatory self-defense."⁴²

He had written on the notion of "preemptive war" in *Duties Beyond Borders*, after a long analysis of the just war theory. "Take the notion that a just war can be a war for self-defense. If it is left as vague as this, it could easily lead to generalization of preventive or preemptive war (should one argue that under modern technological conditions, survival requires one to strike before one is attacked), and in

³³ Hoffmann, *Chaos and Violence*, 124.

³⁴ Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles, Or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

³⁵ "Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008," March 19, 2008, accessed June 10, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public-attitudes-toward-the-war-in-iraq-20032008/>.

³⁶ Frank Newport, "American Public Opinion and Iraq," December 19, 2011, accessed June 10, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/169370/american-public-opinion-iraq.aspx>.

³⁷ Frank Newport, "Seventy-Two Percent of Americans Support War Against Iraq," March 24, 2003, accessed June 10, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/8038/seventytwo-percent-americans-support-war-against-iraq.aspx>.

³⁸ Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver Unbound. America's Imperial Temptation and the War in Iraq* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 79.

³⁹ For one analysis of the role of US media in leading the country to war against Iraq, see also William A. Dorman, "A Debate Delayed Is a Debate Denied: U.S. News Media before the 2003 War with Iraq," in *Leading to the 2003 Iraq War: The Global Media Debate*, ed. Alexander G. Nikolaev (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 11–22.

⁴⁰ Hoffmann, "Politics," 168.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 162–3.

⁴² Hoffmann quoted in David E. Sanger, "A New Doctrine for War," *The New York Times* (March 18, 2003).

fact to a generalization of war altogether, because it does not tell you against what self-defense is just—against an armed attack? A seizure of hostages? An expropriation of enterprises? The mistreatment of one's nationals?"⁴³

According to Hoffmann, if we limited the problem to the supposed detention of weapons of mass destruction by an illiberal regime, we could probably argue that the cause to war, in the case of Iraq, was legitimate; the fact that systematic diplomatic action would have been unsuccessful remained unproven in any case. Concerning the proportionality and effectiveness of the means used, the doubts that many had raised were legitimate. Indeed, the number of dead and wounded Iraqi civilians caused by the intervention was not declared for a long time.⁴⁴

Lastly, the US acted with the lack of an international mandate, something that Hoffmann considered unjustifiable. The Bush administration conducted the war with a "coalition of the willing,"⁴⁵ a group of nations that joined the US in the conflict, without formal authorization of the UN and NATO, a decision that deeply affected America's relations with its allies.

5 Transatlantic Relations after Iraq

On September 13, 2001, the daily French newspaper *Le Monde* published an op-ed article entitled "Nous sommes tous américains."⁴⁶ The author, Jean-Marie Colombani, expressed a feeling of solidarity toward the American people widely and genuinely shared by European public opinion. Such solidarity was translated at a diplomatic level as well, when, for the first time in history, the countries of the European Union invoked Article 5 of the NATO Charter, raising the mutual defense clause. The invasion of Afghanistan, the first American response to the attacks, was therefore conducted with the unanimous support of European governments. There were, of course, critics of the war against Afghanistan, and European public opinion did not side entirely with the US in its decision to start a war.⁴⁷

The intervention in Afghanistan, nonetheless, acquired the necessary legal support. On the contrary, the decision to invade Iraq was not backed by the UN and was widely criticized throughout Europe. On September 12, 2002, while speaking in front of the audience of the UN, President Bush, referring to the Baghdad regime, said, "Delegates to the General Assembly, we have been more than patient. We've tried sanctions. We've tried the carrot of oil for food and the stick of coalition military strikes.... If Iraq's regime defies us again, the world must move deliberately, decisively, to hold Iraq to account. We will work with the UN Security Council for the necessary resolutions."⁴⁸ The Security Council responded by adopting Resolution 1441, stating that Iraq was violating previous Resolutions. When Saddam Hussein refused to respect the clauses of those Resolutions again, the Bush administration decided to deploy US troops to the Middle-Eastern country. The main partner of the United States was the United Kingdom, governed by Prime Minister Tony Blair. The coalition invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003. On May 1, the mission was declared accomplished.

Before the war was declared, Hoffmann wrote an article in *The New York Review of Books* assessing the results of the first year and a half of the Bush administration. One of the major political mistakes the US government had made, he wrote, was that it threatened the other countries of proceeding unilaterally on Iraq. To pursue its strategy, the US had deliberately divided the NATO alliance "in order

⁴³ Stanley Hoffmann, *Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 49; Hoffmann's insistence on proportionality in the use of force is strictly linked to the notion of "total cold war" in the age of nuclear deterrence.

⁴⁴ Hoffmann, *Gulliver Unbound*, 68–9.

⁴⁵ George W. Bush, Interview With Czech Television (November 12, 2002), The American Presidency Project, accessed July 11, 2017 <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6>.

⁴⁶ Jean-Marie Colombani, "Nous sommes tous américains," *Le Monde* (September 13, 2001), accessed July 11, 2017 http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2007/05/23/nous-sommes-tous-americains_913706_3232.html.

⁴⁷ See Josef Joffe, "Collateral Damage," *Time** (March 3, 2003): 33, and Michael Cox, "Commentary: Martians and Venutians in the New World Order," *International Affairs*, 79:3 (2003):523–32.

⁴⁸ Text: "Bush's Speech to U.N. on Iraq," *The New York Times* (September 12, 2002).

to isolate the French and Germans provoking both countries by asking for NATO military assistance to Turkey that the Turks themselves had not solicited⁴⁹ and the European Union, with the help of the English prime minister. Bush, according to Hoffmann, had treated the allies like “shoe polish for American boots.”⁵⁰ Hoffmann wrote, “This disdain for international institutions, and adoption of a strategic doctrine that gives a prominent place to preemptive war in violations of the provisions of the UN Charter, along with the decision to go to war without the support of the Security Council required by the Charter, are all part of a tough new policy of US predominance whose implications are extremely serious but remain largely unexamined.”⁵¹ Actually, the conflict caused divisions among all the countries of Europe, even the non-EU members. Spain, Italy, and the countries of Eastern Europe, soon to be member states of NATO and the EU, supported the intervention. France, Germany, and Russia (and China) opposed it.

While governments took different positions on the war, European citizens were unanimously against it. As Geir Lundestad underscored, the French and German position on the Iraqi conflict “had the support of public opinion in virtually every European country, even including Britain As the crisis over Iraq developed in 2003, majorities in most European countries no longer had confidence even in the United States as such.”⁵²

Being a European student and an expert on French history and politics, Hoffmann devoted a great part of his reflection on Iraq to the future of transatlantic relations, and particularly on US relations with France. “American francophobia is an old and complicated phenomenon,” he declared to Bozo,⁵³ perhaps deliberately avoiding the fact that the contrary was also true. France has its own history of anti-americanism.⁵⁴

The 2003 crisis was not the first big crisis between the transatlantic allies. Hoffmann, in any case, distinguished it from the previous ones. This time, he wrote, there had been no place for negotiations. Americans were defending a vital interest and “any dissidence would be punished.”⁵⁵ He was convinced that the US media were partly responsible for the wave of anti-French polemics crossing the country, and that they often organized a deliberate “well-orchestrated campaign of innuendoes, distortions, and lies aimed not only at discrediting French arguments but at France herself.”⁵⁶ Hoffmann defended the French government’s reasons for opposing the war: France trusted the reports of UN inspectors on the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, was reluctant “to wage a war for a regime change,” and, having a population of almost six million people of Islamic faith, wanted to avoid a “clash of civilizations” between the Islamic world and the West on its soil.⁵⁷

As Hoffmann explained, the reasons for the crisis between the US and the EU laid in the different views on foreign policy. American policy makers were adopting a dogmatic attitude, while European governments were acting in a pragmatic way and evaluating the consequences of each step made. They considered the fight against terrorism much more complicated than the United States presented it. According to Europeans, there was more than one enemy to destroy and there was more than one goal to achieve. The risk of misinterpreting the events was too high and could increase the state of world disorder.⁵⁸

⁴⁹ Stanley Hoffmann, “America Goes Backward,” *The New York Review of Books*, 1:10 (June 12, 2003): 74.

⁵⁰ Hoffmann, *Gulliver Unbound*, 126.

⁵¹ Hoffmann, “America,” 75.

⁵² Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: From “Empire” by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 276.

⁵³ Hoffmann, *Gulliver Unbound*, 5.

⁵⁴ See for instance Jean-François Revel, *L’obsession anti-américaine: son fonctionnement, ses causes, ses conséquences* (Paris: Éditions Plon, 2002), and Philippe Roger, *L’ennemi américain: Généalogie de l’antiaméricanisme français* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

⁵⁵ Hoffmann, *Gulliver Unbound*, 10.

⁵⁶ Stanley Hoffmann, “France, the United States, and Iraq,” *The Nation* (February 2004), reprinted in Hoffmann, *Chaos and Violence*, 159–60.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵⁸ Stanley Hoffmann, “U.S.-European Relations: Past and Future,” *International Affairs*, 79:5 (2003):1029–36.

Moreover, European governments had to deal with public opinion, where the vast majority opposed the war, and was facing an intense wave of antiamericanism.⁵⁹

The crisis was so deep that the most-cited book to interpret the state of transatlantic relations, back then, was Robert Kagan's *Paradise and Power*, in which the author argues that Europeans and Americans have completely different and conflictual worldviews, the former interpreting the international system in Kantian terms and the latter in Hobbesian ones.⁶⁰

After the attacks of September 11, some observers even speculated about the possible end of the West.⁶¹ Yet, what transatlantic partners were experiencing was an institutional crisis that did not affect their common values; what had changed in the field of international relations was the political role that the United States and Europe attributed to themselves.⁶²

6 “One Can Only Destroy What One Can Replace”. The End of Conflict

The war in Iraq was brief, but its consequences have yet to be fully understood. At the end of the military operations, the first knot to be untangled was how to get away from the country while guaranteeing its stability at the same time.

The US troops surprisingly lacked any sort of preparation on how to manage the aftermath of the war. In Hoffmann's words, it seemed like a “return to the ‘Vietnam syndrome’: once again we find confused objectives, a misunderstanding of the attitude of the ‘natives’ toward the ‘liberators’, confrontations between terrorists of mysterious origins and experience and heavy conventional forces. As in Vietnam, the choice at present is between an ‘undignified’ withdrawal ... and an increase in foreign military forces.”⁶³ Obviously, the last option would pose a number of problems, not least that of being highly unpopular among Iraqis (and probably worldwide).

The withdrawal from Iraq had therefore to be progressive and take place only after regular elections, organized with the supervision of the UN. As time passed, he warned, “[the American troops] are likely to be caught up in conflicts among political factions, tribal leaders, religious groups, and ethnic forces eager either to oppose or court the occupiers.”⁶⁴ As Hoffmann himself recognized later, his analysis was incorrect. The main consequence of the Iraqi insurrection in the aftermath of the conflict, mostly organized by Sunnis, was the beginning of a civil war, and not of a clash between rebels and American troops.

The war had to end at a diplomatic level as well. It was fundamental to clarify that the “war on terrorism,” at least by that means, was over, or other regimes could feel legitimized to start conflicts in its name. Above all, Ariel Sharon could feel free to act in Palestine and Vladimir Putin in Chechnya. “Withdrawal from Iraq, combined with a new effort by the United States, the United Nations, the European Union, and Russia to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and to create a livable Palestinian state, would mark a return to reality, to good sense, and to a moral politics.”⁶⁵ Hoffmann certainly knew that he was asking too much of any US administration. But the presidential elections were getting closer, and the time was right to launch insights into the public debate.

⁵⁹ For a comprehensive account, see Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Kohane, *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), and Piero Craveri and Gaetano Quagliariello, *L'antiamericanismo in Italia e in Europa nel secondo dopoguerra* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2004).

⁶⁰ Robert Kagan, *On Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

⁶¹ See Charles A. Kupchan, “The End of the West,” *The Atlantic* (November 2002).

⁶² Federico Romero, “Dalla convergenza alla divaricazione,” in *Quale occidente, occidente perché*, ed. Tiziano Bonazzi (Soveria Mannelli, 2005), 189-190. See also Jeffrey J. Anderson, John G. Ikenberry, and Thomas Risse, eds., *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁶³ Hoffmann, *Gulliver Unbound*, 138.

⁶⁴ Hoffmann, *Chaos and Violence*, 172.

⁶⁵ Hoffmann, *Chaos and Violence*, 175.

7 The Way It Should Be: US Foreign Policy According to Hoffmann

The volume *Gulliver's Troubles or the Setting of American Foreign Policy*, published in 1968, is doubtless Hoffmann's most complete study of American foreign policy. In it, he described the style of US foreign policy as a mix of "formulism" and "formalism."⁶⁶ By that, he meant that American policy makers, too focused on theory and pre-assumptions, failed to understand the history and politics of foreign countries. In Hoffmann's view, they erroneously tended to apply abstract theories to very different situations, with the result, in most cases, of causing damage instead of solving problems.

Later on, in a collection of essays published between 1979 and 1982, he described American foreign policy as a series of "dead ends."⁶⁷ Nothing changed after the Cold War ended. According to Hoffmann, both Republicans and Democrats were convinced that the US had acquired some sort of supremacy with the end of the Second World War, a supremacy "seen as both a fact of power and a condition of world security and prosperity."⁶⁸

The hegemonic position of the US was hardly deniable, but it had to be reconsidered in the light of globalization. In an increasingly interdependent world, American superiority basically coincided with its military strength. In Hoffmann's view, that was not enough to maintain superiority. Force could also be misused, as in the case of Iraq, and undermine America's credibility. To keep its position as the linchpin of the international system, the US had to invest in a genuine multilateral policy with its allies and conduct a "drastic long-term policy of demilitarization carried out in collaboration with foreign partners," beginning with the reduction of military expenses. Hoffman wrote, "Our military budget is more likely to be a provocation than a deterrent to America's current rivalry with China."⁶⁹

Restoring multilateralism and reducing tensions among states was also essential to increase the effectiveness of the UN and preserve the world peace. A reform of UN structures was badly needed and could only be achieved with international cooperation.⁷⁰ Hoffmann also envisioned the creation of an association of liberal and democratic states that could exert pressure to take action on the Secretary General whenever the UN was contrary to or incapable of intervention to stop abuses committed by illiberal regimes, and provide support and assistance to newly democratized regimes.⁷¹

To face the terrorist threat, it was ultimately necessary to coordinate national police services and restore an international system of justice to punish individuals responsible for crimes, rather than states. In the long run, the US would nonetheless have gone back to multilateral management of international crises, as the nature of challenges left no room for any other option. The imperial vision that some continued to defend would eventually clash with national sentiment. "The moment will come when the American people will understand that the values of which they are proud are incompatible with the practice of empire, which undermines its authority abroad and its institutions.... For an anxious wounded nationalism, the imperial temptation is strong, but it is not inevitable or irreversible."⁷²

8 Conclusions

Stanley Hoffmann's analyses of September 11 and the war in Iraq must be distinguished.

The former implies a look backwards at the causes of terrorism and raises general theoretical questions. As Robert Keohane emphasized, in fact, Hoffmann thought of theory as a series of questions

⁶⁶ Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles*, 126.

⁶⁷ Stanley Hoffmann, *Dead Ends. American Foreign Policy in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing, 1983).

⁶⁸ Stanley Hoffmann, "The Foreign Policy the United States Needs," *The New York Review of Books*, LXIII:13 (August 13, 2006): 62.

⁶⁹ Hoffmann, "The Foreign Policy," 63; on the US's use of military strength and rhetoric, see also Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷⁰ Hoffmann, *Gulliver Unbound*, 118.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 121–2.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 146.

applied to history.⁷³ Hoffmann's explanation of terrorism involved political balances in the Middle East and the effects of globalization. Answering Bush's famous question—"Why do they hate us?"—Hoffmann pointed out that the supposed "envy" of democratic values and respect for individual rights present in the US was not a satisfactory explanation. Indeed, if democracy were the goal of all the individuals on earth, it would be very easy to build democratic regimes in every corner of the world.

In my opinion, the arguments he raised are extremely important for developing a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon. This is not to say that they necessarily offer a solution, but they stress the need to put the three dimensions of globalization back in the center of public discourse. What contemporary events have dramatically revealed is that its effects are potentially dangerous not only on a global stage, but also locally. A reappraisal of globalization's basic assumptions may be insufficient to prevent phenomena of ideological radicalization, but it would certainly lead to a more equal and fair world, and one in which mid-range and small powers share in responsibility for the global affairs.

In the case of Iraq, Hoffmann's analysis engaged primarily with the questions of *jus ad bellum*. He pointed out that both the claim of illegal detention of weapons of mass destruction by the Iraqi regime and the humanitarian argument were inconsistent and could serve as dangerous precedents for future decisions. Never before, in fact, had intervention been undertaken "to forcibly remove a government and replace it with one more acceptable to the interveners,"⁷⁴ appealing to the defense of human rights.

The war in Iraq represented an emblematic negative example of foreign policy and offered Hoffmann the chance to stress that if genuine multilateralism is desirable, and indeed it is the only way to preserve stability and peace, the US had to take the first step in that direction. Notwithstanding this general interpretation of how US foreign policy should be, his advice on Iraq was addressed to the Bush administration, not the US administrations of the past and future. From the very beginning, Hoffmann's suggestion was not to declare war on Iraq. Once the decision was made, the only thing he could do (and did) was suggest a way out.

The problem with Hoffmann's strategy of withdrawal is that it doesn't reveal much on what to do when the other actors, i.e., the UN and the EU, do not want to cooperate with the US. That is to say, no US administration formulates its foreign policy in a historical and political vacuum.

On Iraq, the US has basically been left alone over the course of time. Bush formulated a strategy of withdrawal from the country in 2008, and when Barack Obama took office, that strategy was modified and applied until the disengagement was completed in 2011. The end of the American presence in Iraq did not exhaust the debate on war. Some connected the withdrawal of US troops to the emergence of the Islamic State and blamed Obama (and his Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton) for having left a fragile country in the hands of radical groups. This is, of course, one point of view. But it raises an important point: once an error has been made, a major one in the case of Iraq, it is impossible to restore the previous balance. Analyses must deal with the new world conditions, confirming what Hoffmann thought of international relations experts; they can analyze the present, but they cannot foresee the future.

⁷³ Robert O. Keohane, "Stanley Hoffmann: Three Brief Essays," *French Politics*, 7:3/4 (September 1, 2009): 369.

⁷⁴ Hoffmann, "America," 80.

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