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Human activity – political, economic as well as social and cultural – has become more and more interdependent across borders. The character and pace of transnational links and the corresponding ideas about these processes in the contemporary world constitute a challenge both to citizens and politicians in their search for an understanding of global, national and regional processes, and to researchers aiming to analyse the continuity and ruptures of present-day societies, and understand what differentiates today’s global encounters from earlier experiences of cultural exchange.

Research at SPIRIT explores topics of crucial importance to the understanding of past and ongoing processes in Europe and the world at large in order to capture the origins, contexts and consequences which have been shaped by long-standing processes of time-space compression in the shape of internationalisation and globalisation. In practice this means that the themes researched, span from transnational phenomena such as international relations, via intercultural and intra-regional issues related to e.g. multinational firms and supranational organisations, to the changing identities and everyday life experiences in individual localities, including uses of history.
Back to Multilateralism?
American Foreign Policy and Follower States

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Only a few short years ago, the optimistic voices of my old economics professors echoed in my mind. A productive division of labor beyond the nation-state promised widening prosperity, the necessary condition for peace. Those voices resounded harmoniously with the remembered voices of some of my international relations professors, who emphasized the sufficient condition – not balance-of-power politics, for war was the traditional means of maintaining such a balance, but the uncontested hegemony of a leading state inclined by history and culture toward the values of liberal internationalism. A few years after I left the classrooms of those professors to become one myself, the Cold War ended, and a new era of globalization coincided neatly with America’s ‘unipolar’ moment. What followed were years of seminars, conferences, and workshops on difficult but tractable economic discontents. In retrospect, it was a blessed time.

But now I find myself scratching my own old professorial head, as my son has just registered for potential military conscription in the United States, as my nephew and godson recently distinguished himself as a US Marine in Iraq, as two cousins in the Army are deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq, as an escalating military rivalry between the United States and China coincides with my research on the deepening integration of their electronics industries, as the formerly fading border between the United States and my second homeland of Canada is fortified and remilitarized, as Canadian and European policymakers appear to be moving with intermittent subtlety but quiet determination to limit the costs and consequences of American unipolarity for their own citizens, as those same policymakers and their counterparts in other industrial states seem paralyzed by the mounting evidence of the fragile environmental foundations of a global economy, and as my outwardly confident but inwardly quite nervous friends at the cutting edge of financial globalization rush to make as much money as they possibly can before the next crisis occurs. The facts of my lived experience, in short, are in tension with the compelling lessons of my teachers.

In fact, intense debate is underway within the United States, as well as among key follower states that turned away from balancing behavior after 1945, on the reconstruction of world order at a time of both continuing global economic transformation and mounting

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disquiet on the most basic issues of national security.¹ The debate is not entirely new, but it has lately entered a more urgent phase. This paper seeks to put that debate into historical context and then to examine a few important implications. One set of implications focuses on the adaptation of novel international institutions created in the aftermath of systemic catastrophe in the middle of the twentieth century. A related set concentrates on conceptual and practical requisites for re-stabilizing the relationship between the United States and its key followers.

Leadership and Followership in the International System

Global order is not spontaneously generated. Policy shapes it, although not necessarily in circumstances of policy-makers' own choosing. The specific policies of some states are more important than others, and those that today count most are the policies of the United States. A system-reshaping moment came in the aftermath of world war, when it faced its broadest choices in the foreign policy realm.

In the security arena, the United States led not only in the construction and adaptation of a successful military alliance, which persisted despite or (more plausibly) because one key member now became a key antagonist. It also managed to transform that alliance into a security community, which decisively moved the advanced industrial world beyond traditional habits of power-balancing.² In the international economic arena, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – both created at the US-dominated Bretton Woods Conference of 1944 – were two of the clearest institutional expressions of a certain American policy vision for world order. Once in existence, they and cognate institutions of incipient global governance, like the institution that eventually became known as the World Trade Organization, wandered along a winding and messy path. In the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, it is no coincidence that such institutions now find themselves in the middle of renewed debate about the place of the United States in the world and about the world's place in its own society. The rest of us are implicated in that debate, and our own parallel debates cannot be disentangled from it.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a leader is, quite simply, "one who is followed." That quickly gets to the heart of the matter. In his classic book, The World in Depression, 1929-1939 (1973), Charles Kindleberger argued that economic crisis turned catastrophic in the 1930s partly because Britain no longer proved capable of leading the system, while its only plausible successor, the United States, proved unwilling to seize the

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² For an overview of relevant literature extending in the contemporary era from the early work of Karl Deutsch and Ernst Haas, see Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds. Security Communities, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
mantle. The now-conventional story is that the Americans had refused in 1920 to embrace their own brainchild, the League of Nations, had retreated from Europe, and, after a period of phony peace, had sought to address internal economic troubles by raising tariffs and cutting ties to a restored gold standard. In consequence, the desultory inter-war attempt to resurrect a functioning security structure on the back of a stable global economy reminiscent of the one preceding the Great War collapsed.

We now know that the kernel of truth here is obscured by exaggeration. The United States, for example, stayed engaged in many operations of the League, and on neither economic nor security matters, it never fully withdrew into isolation. But the commonplace view after World War II was that the United States had finally learned its lesson. It came out of the war with a new purpose. It would lead the world, and it would do so benevolently, guided by a liberal vision of open markets, international cooperation, anti-militarism, and limited forms of international resource redistribution to facilitate economic adjustment. Nothing better expressed that vision than the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the Marshall Plan.

A hefty dose of exaggeration marked this image too. Hegemonic stability theory has been justly attacked for oversimplifying a complex reality. But surely something like just such a self-image within the United States helped shape the country's foreign policy during much of the post-World War II period, and, whether the view was broadly shared abroad or not, it suited much of the rest of the world to go along. By the time the Cold War ended in Europe, that image and that policy had been put through severe tests, and the rest of the world apparently began having doubts. Not least, the Vietnam War and its economic legacy prompted renewed questioning among America’s allies and fellow-travelers. In its aftermath, the central commitment of the Bretton Woods Agreement – pegged exchange rates – was abrogated, inflation coursed through the international economy, non-tariff barriers to trade multiplied, sophisticated weapons proliferated, and American society itself seemed to become unhinged. Throughout the 1980s, many questions were asked inside the country as well as outside. Was the United States a reliable leader anymore? Was it in its own interests to lead? What vision truly reinforced its claim to leadership? Could it be benevolent – if not necessarily altruistic, then at least not excessively selfish? Was it still in the interests of others to follow? Or was it now in their interests to attempt an alternative strategy, perhaps a strategy of grudging and minimal support, or a strategy of quiet resistance?

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The euphoria accompanying the end of the Cold War, combined with a broad economic upturn, rendered such questions less salient for a time. But throughout the 1990s, doubts arose. Political realists started warning that Europeans and Americans in particular would soon forget the lessons of the inter-war period. They held that we would all miss the Cold War, which in their view acted to suppress national antagonisms and encourage the degree of cooperation necessary to prevail in a great ideological struggle. Apparently motivated by similar fears, both Conservative and Liberal governments moved Canada more fully under the putatively protective American economic umbrella, first through freer trade and then with a freer investment regime. Mexico eventually did the same, and foreign policy debates on both sides of the Atlantic prominently featured the specter of increasingly competitive regional blocs.

Simultaneously, scholars from a broad range of disciplines began to inquire into the intimate and complex linkage between the domestic economy and polity of the United States and global stability and prosperity. Post-war international organizations were central to theoretical and policy debates on the nature and quality of that linkage. For neorealists, they were nothing but epiphenomena, reflections of deeper realities. They could be slightly helpful at times, but they could never be particularly important instruments of states pursuing their most vital interests. For liberals, conversely, they still promised a deepening process of information sharing and knowledge building capable of encouraging collaborative decisions based on common interests and shared long-term goals; they helped cast the shadow of the future on present calculations of interest. For constructivists, meanwhile, they signified much more – the expressions of a unique linkage of power and legitimate social purpose and the hope of transforming the very identities of citizens and decision-makers as they moved progressively to construct a global polity. At the heart of all three major perspectives was a sense that post-war global order very much began at home, and especially at home in the United States.

Given its raw power in 1945, the United States was capable of coercing its neighbors and allies, if not all potential adversaries. But coercion is costly. As the Romans proved in the heyday of the Republic, the indirect extension of authority in the dominions can work better for all concerned than the alternative mechanism of empire. Raw power capable of being drawn upon is certainly useful. But if it actually needs to be drawn, it can quickly dissipate, not least because of revulsion or increasing reluctance to bear the costs within

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the society of the power-wielder. A wise leader, in short, learns how to generate willing followers. In this regard, a mutually acceptable guiding vision is the key.

Followers need to have a sense that the leader's choices are informed not only by short-run and narrow calculations of interest. The claim to leadership is, then, a claim to legitimacy. Authority willingly acquiesced in is likely to be more enduring that power bluntly asserted. In the long run, right makes might. The United States made such a claim to leadership after 1945, and that claim certainly did garner support, sometimes in the form of burden-sharing, sometimes in the form of grudging acquiescence. In retrospect, it seems clear that discrete economic and military organizations multilateral in character were designed by the United States to accomplish just such a task.⁷ Sometimes, those organizations actually solved problems, but mainly they generated followership. Sometimes key follower states pretended that their purpose was to tame US power, and often the United States went along with this fiction. But they did succeed in masking that power, rendering it more acceptable and more effective in a world still highly prize national autonomy. They also succeeded in promoting and sometimes repairing the principal mechanism favored by the United States for pacifying the system – globalizing markets.

So why are we now regularly greeted in our morning newspapers with assessments like this one?

The troubles at the IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organization are paradoxical. It's not that the underlying forces of globalization have gone limp; it's that nobody wants to invest political capital in global institutions. . . . Trade liberalization has stalled, aid is less coherent than it should be, and the next financial conflagration will be managed by an injured fireman. . . . The same lethargy infects other bastions of political multilateralism. . . . Fifteen years ago, there were hopes that the end of Cold War splits would allow international institutions to acquire a new cohesion. But the great powers of today are simply not interested in creating a resilient multilateral system.⁸

The question is whether the post-war system of governance and the carefully calibrated vision of global order within the United States itself is now yielding to a foreign policy at the core of the system ill-suited to the task of effective engagement beyond national borders. To ask such a question is to inquire as much into the conditions of followership as of leadership. Let me turn to a more detailed discussion of those conditions.

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Foundations of World Order

A decade after the end of the Cold War in Europe, informed by a nagging suspicion that fundamental choices were now again up for grabs, a number of studies cast a backward glance at the world order constructed after 1945. As the war was coming to an end, as John Ikenberry explained in a first-rate example of the genre, the political space seemed open within the United States to any number of post-war foreign policy choices, except the discredited one of reverting to isolationism.9

One proposed vision centered on the notion of "one world," an idea conveyed then and now by the term "global governance." People like Norman Cousins and Albert Einstein hearkened back to a Kantian dream of enlightened cosmopolitan political design. One could almost hear Beethoven and Schiller in the background, and one could see the nuclear mushroom cloud in the foreground. All men shall be brothers; one people, one government. Alas, the vision had no political traction. The American political system could summon neither the ideological enthusiasm for it nor the will to pay for it. The debate over ratification of the 1944 Bretton Woods Agreement, as well as the subsequent and failed effort to create an International Trade Organization, underlined the durability of American concerns over the locus of ultimate sovereign authority.

Certainly of related parentage, Ikenberry argued, the alternative design which did have some traction – not least because it promised globalism without cost – was derisively called "Hullism" by John Maynard Keynes. US Secretary of State Cordell Hull became most clearly associated with a vision of an open trading system, which once established would automatically tie basic national interests together around the world and more or less inexorably work to channel aggressive impulses in constructive directions. Free trade, and underlying markets constructed on liberal principles, would work its magic, and cooperative international politics would follow. In the event, the vision proved unrealistic, a mere cover for a US reversion to non-intervention in affairs abroad, affairs that in point of fact desperately required US intervention. The Europeans, and the Canadians, would have none of it.

The third vision was that of Atlantic Union, a vision with a certain constituency in the US State Department, in Whitehall, and in Ottawa. An Anglo-Saxon alliance, militarized, institutionalized, and willingly bearing the burden of reconstructing and civilizing the rest of the world. The vestiges of the British Empire could be implanted into such a vision, but the union would be more tolerant, gradually more open, and certainly more stable. This also proved a dream. The US Congress, the US Treasury, the Russians, the Indians, the Chinese, the French, and more quietly, the Germans and the Japanese, absolutely refused to go along.

A more realistic vision focused on increasingly open world regions, spheres of influence reasonably cohesive on their own and capable of balancing one another in a multipolar arrangement. In such an environment, the United States would play the role of ultimate balancer. Although a divided US domestic system proved incapable of operationalizing such a system after the war and, in any case, profound ideological struggle with the Soviet Union soon rendered it untenable, this particular vision would reassert itself a half century after the war on the basis of some compelling empirical evidence to which I will return.10

In the post-war period, however, another more practicable vision actually emerged at the heart of US foreign policy and in the design of future world order. It centered on permanent and deep forward engagement by the United States, both political and economic, in Canada, Latin America, Japan, and Western Europe. The vision countenanced an integrating but relatively open European regional economy, an economy that especially after 1947 had quickly to prove itself capable of preventing the spread of communism. For similar reasons, that vision tolerated, even encouraged, a soft mercantilism in a rapidly rebuilding Japanese economy. It also necessitated the establishment of a strong-enough but not too strong set of intergovernmental economic organizations capable of facilitating mutually beneficial collaboration among states able to nurture liberalism as both an internal and external creed. In addition, that very process of nurturing implied the emergence of distinctive but interdependent social democracies, a process that the US Treasury refused to finance with unlimited overdraft facilities but a process resurgent private institutions on Wall Street eventually very much did want to finance. Within the limits of increasingly open capitalism, the vision accommodated, even celebrated, domestic structural diversity and the intentional blurring of political authority at the global level. Preponderance, predominance, primacy, and hegemony: all have been used by observers to characterize the political foundations of a world order consistent with such a vision. Leadership will do just as well, although the former synonyms do more starkly suggest the necessity of obfuscation.

However we label it, that second vision was also able to be translated more consistently into effective policy focused on the creation and maintenance of a nuclear deterrent force. The overarching image was of bipolar stability, with the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Japan organized around one pole and the Soviet Union and, after 1949, China centered on the other. Translating this image into policy without turning its political system into a garrison state was a core test for American society, which critics say it failed. At various junctures in post-war history, it is not hard to see their point. But the overall picture before 2001 seemed closer to that painted by Aaron Friedberg. The separation of powers in government, an instinctive distrust of concentrated power in the economy, and an anti-statist tradition of thought helped the internal US system adapt

remarkably fluidly to bipolarity.\textsuperscript{11} It is also arguable that this adaptation was facilitated by the fact that American society is more cohesive than it sometimes seems. Particularly at moments of crisis, national resolve may have been easier to sustain than is often supposed.

If during the inter-war period the United States held itself together partly by shuttling out the external realm, thus reinforcing an ultimate slide toward global disintegration, a generation of policy-makers came out of the experience of the Second World War with a firm belief that their primary task was to avoid a repetition. The romantics among them held onto the hope that they could eventually remake the world in the American image. Their pragmatic colleagues settled for making a future world safer for American society. A dual vision of world order – an interdependent, growing, and managed world economy combined with clearly hierarchical stability in the security sphere – accommodated both.

Perhaps much of the real world survived and even prospered in the post-1945 period by chance. Blind, dumb luck should never be discounted as a dominant force in human affairs. It is at least arguable, however, that this complicated dual vision of world order actually conformed to broad expectations of the best that could be achieved under the circumstances – both inside the United States and among its principal followers at the core of the system. In any case, the dual vision proved politically feasible. Despite its highly problematic domestic governing structure, its anti-statist, and its nativist traditions, it is just possible that the United States truly led the world in a progressive direction for over fifty years. It is undoubtedly the case that many people and many countries were left behind in that world, but at least until 2001 those left behind had not managed to gather enough power to shake the very foundations of the system. In such an environment, the international economic institutions and the markets they helped govern promoted core American interests, gave others a limited voice in the definition, articulation, and expression of those interests, and, in general, served as a useful political buffer between leader and followers.

\textbf{The Challenging New Context}

If it is true that the dual vision succeeded, at least for a long time, several questions now confront analysts. To what extent did that success actually depend upon a sense of clear and present danger, such that the tendency for Americans to turn inward was capable of being resisted? To what extent was a widely shared perception of crisis actually essential to sustaining the bipartisan consensus needed to make the awkward machinery of government in the United States work in such a way that follower states benefited enough to keep them from reverting to balancing behavior? To what extent was the reality of international political and ideological challenge required for American elites to repress their narrower interests and, most importantly, to countenance the creation internally and externally of stabilizing redistributive mechanisms, which would and did distort the

operation of international markets? To what extent did the collapse of the Soviet Union change all of that and bring the Americans, and by extension the rest of us, straight back to the foreign policy debates of 1945? Did the United States really want to lead any more? And did the followers still want to follow?

As we consider such questions, the distinction between willing deference and quiet defiance on the part of those a leader aspires to lead is essential. It certainly became clear when the reactions to the events of 11 September 2001 are contrasted with the immediate aftermath of the US decision to topple Saddam Hussein a year and a half later.

Notwithstanding the debatable policies of the Bush Administration, especially in 2003, and the debatable reactions to those policies, the original dual vision of the post-war era had not yet been entirely supplanted by another within the United States and among elites in Canada, Western Europe, and Japan. It is true that some realists are beginning to toy with the fourth vision rejected after World War II, that is, the vision of a true multipolar balance of power, with the United States holding the balance and assertively defending a narrowly defined set of interests. But even Americans enamored of Bismarck, not to speak of their French counterparts still not keen to mention that name, seem to shy away from putting balance-of-power theory clearly into contemporary practice.

More visibly creeping up on the shaky consensus regarding the wisdom of the status quo are two more radical challenges. The first also has both a left variant and a right variant. On the left, proponents appear to want to recover and revive the first vision of world order rejected in the aftermath of World War II. They seek global governance with a democratic and progressive face. World federalism, a global state, confederation, borderless social democracy. Post-modern criticism aside, the new idealists are tapping into a deep vein. The Enlightenment surely lives on to some extent in Europe and North America. Indeed, most of us cling to the hope that progress is still possible in human affairs and that freedom can be meaningful and meaningfully creative. In the end, however, the extreme idealistic vision remains a dangerous illusion. A panacea that substitutes for thought.

Whatever its practicability, this left vision of a new world order remains much less dangerous than an alternative vision gathering support on the right. In essence, it recalls the second vision rejected by the Americans after 1945. It is a vision of global markets, automatically adjusting, self-governing. The less romantic of its adherents again also seem to be toying now with uniting such a vision with multipolarity, or spheres of influence – Europeans taking care of Balkan problems, China recognized as inevitably hegemonic in East Asia, Russia taking care of itself and a now-smaller group of satellites, India dominating a sub-continent stabilized by a nuclear stand-off, the United States paying particular attention to the Americas but keeping a hand in all the regional blocs. Of course, the markets still linking those blocs would require no central regulatory authority. They would even supersede intergovernmental regulatory structures. At most, they would rely on informal networks of technical specialists, like central bankers.
The basic problem with this entire scheme, which for some reason carries the label ‘conservative’ in American political discourse, is the same as the problem it faced over five decades ago. The multipolar balancing part cannot be managed by the American polity, even if it were acceptable within the world’s various regions, which it is not. Even a minimally coherent American foreign policy relies on some sort of liberalizing, world-transforming sense of destiny. Conversely, followers expecting the exercise of legitimate authority at the global level have never shown themselves for long to be willing to accept American leadership unguided by some idea broader than American self-interest. As for the ultimate reliability of informal epistemic networks to guarantee system stability, let us just say empirical support is hard to find in the annals of contemporary history, especially during the crisis moments when political deference to technical expertise might appear to be most needed.

In the wake of the Iraq War, and contemplating new security threats, even realists now underline the wisdom of reviving the workable post-1945 vision. Henry Kissinger, for example, recently commented as follows on the Bush Administration’s strategy of threat prevention:

The analysis . . . is correct in emphasizing the changes in the international environment and the propensity (or perhaps even necessity) they create towards some forms of preventive strategy. But stating the theory is only a first step. The concept must be applied to specific, concrete contingencies; courses of action need to be analyzed not only in terms of threats but of outcomes and consequences. Conclusions must go beyond position papers to plans of action capable of implementation on the working level and include enough congressional participation to bring about sustainable public support. Finally, a policy that allows for preventive force can sustain the international system only if solitary American enterprises are the rare exception, not the basic rule of American strategy. The other major nations have a similar responsibility to take the new challenges seriously and to treat them as something beyond the sole responsibility of America. A common approach, however contrary to historical experience, may be possible because what used to be called the "great powers" have nothing to gain by military conflict with each other. They are all more or less dependent on the global economic system. They are all threatened (if not symmetrically) if ideology and weapons run out of control. They should know that, after the use of weapons of mass destruction or universal carnage due to a clash of civilizations, their publics will demand some form of preventive diplomacy. The challenge is to build a viable international order without the impetus of having survived catastrophe.

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12 “The American refusal to be bound by history and the insistence on the perpetual possibility for renewal confer a great dignity, even beauty, on the American way of life… A country with America's idealistic tradition cannot base its policy on the balance of power as the sole criterion for a new world order”. Henry A. Kissinger, Diplomacy, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994: 833-834.

The other reason for renewing the earlier vision has to do with the illusion that markets can ever work automatically. The hyper-romantic alternative, ironically often held by economists and business people who consider themselves to be hard-nosed, that democratic governments can actually stand back while markets work their magic has repeatedly been contradicted by experience since 1931. Confronting crisis, governments have learned to bail markets out, and to bail them out frequently. With that bailing comes moral hazard, and, in its train, regulation and supervision.

Karl Polanyi's insight remains as relevant today as it did in 1944, the self-regulating global market is a chimera, a beautiful flower bearing the ugly seeds of social and political catastrophe if we ever begin seriously to believe that such a market can actually exist. Post-war international economic organizations, like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, have always signified an alternative; however opaque the foundations of world order have become, however much they each have evolved over time, they continue to symbolize a common international economic life under continuing US leadership. More practically, and perhaps only for the moment, they still hold the promise that adjustment and development can be mutually reinforcing. True, given the vagaries of power as it exists, they also accommodate and all-too-partially compensate for the fact that most of that adjustment has always been borne by the weak, while most of that development has tended to benefit the strong disproportionately. Without requiring even lukewarm supporters to relinquish any ideological priors, their continued if troubled existence speaks to a less-than-transparent broader objective: a stable international economy built around notions of economic efficiency friendly to American national interests but in which a degree of legitimacy is accorded to rising demands for distributive justice. It is no coincidence that tension between principles of efficiency and justice at the international level parallels a similar and enduring struggle inside American society itself, a struggle only masked periodically by booming markets.

That said, the outlines of a feasible if undesirable challenge to the US-led post-1945 economic order, are becoming clearer in the gathering erosion of normative solidarity represented by a proliferation of regional competitors and alternative forums with selective memberships and weak or non-existent secretariats. After the emergence of the euro, European members understandably shifted their attention away from Washington toward Frankfurt, even as they demonstrated little interest in reducing their formal stakes in the less-relevant Bretton Woods institutions. More recently, key East and Southeast Asian states have been insulating themselves with excessive monetary reserves and

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indicated serious interest in constructing an alternative regional system for voluntary consultations, technical assistance, and temporary financing. Parallel efforts in Africa and Latin America periodically gain and lose momentum. Even in a policy arena that should be fairly easy to manage, Ted Truman asks the key question: “Can the global monetary system function effectively with more than one set of understandings, conventions, and rules, for example about the trade-off between financing and adjustment or about the ultimate goals of capital account liberalization?”

The collective repudiation of the normative consensus underpinning the post-1945 order could certainly occur. It could be occasioned by a catastrophic crisis of confidence in multilateralism, perhaps following a system-changing shock beyond the capacity of states themselves to address. Alternatively, it could wither away quietly, eroded by a formalism divorced from meaningful policy implications or, as Robert Gilpin predicted some time ago, by the gradual coalescence of self-sufficient regional economic blocs. Nothing stops us from doing what we can to prevent either scenario from becoming reality.

**Grounds for Optimism?**
Throughout this paper, I have alluded to an important dimension of the psychological and political challenge of recovering our balance and restoring the circumstances under which we all might return to the path of global openness, spreading prosperity, and contained security threats. After 1941, the United States learned how to lead, which means that it somehow came to understand why followers followed. In part, after the war ended, the United States and its major allies institutionalized this knowledge in discrete international organizations, which they pretended to be technical but knew to be profoundly political. Eventually, those organizations affected the way Americans think about their own sovereignty. It would be nice to believe that foresight found expression in this way; in truth, the twilight struggle of the Cold War probably provided the real incentive. It would also be nice to believe that the fears stoked by Osama bin Laden are not yet sufficient to prompt a decisive reversion to the delusion of Fortress America.

Charles Kupchan persuasively argued in his 2003 book that “the peaceful management of relations among proximate centers of power requires three essential ingredients: the exercise of strategic restraint, the establishment of binding and bounding institutions, and the pursuit of social integration needed to promote familiarity, trust and a sense of common identity and purpose.” Consistent with this argument, in a book on the International Monetary Fund a few years ago, I tried to demonstrate how, in a bid to stabilize the system after its post-war unipolar moment had passed, the United States

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decided in the mid-1970s to make surprising concessions, concessions which set a
standard for itself and for follower states.¹⁸

Eventually, through a series of agreements and understandings so densely textured and so
thickly institutionalized that it became difficult to imagine their abrogation, the American
state rendered itself meaningfully accountable to other states. It obliged itself to account
publicly for domestic economic policies that had an impact beyond its sovereign borders.
Although neither the United States nor the other signatories to the treaty reconstituting the
IMF acknowledged lines of direct political responsibility for the citizens of other states,
they did accept a new legal obligation that subtly altered a traditionalist understanding of
the external dimension of their sovereignty. As the leading state in a system designed to
tend toward economic, social, and cultural openness, the United States did so to model
behavior for others. Through that modeling and through the institutional working-out of
the accountability commitment, it attempted to blur the boundaries around its polity and
to construct compatible political identities elsewhere. These identities combined enduring
nationalism with increasing openness. In short, the United States thereby created a key
condition for followership.

In our justifiable fascination with the subject of leadership, scholars of international
relations have left the phenomenon of followership undertheorized. This is not the place
for a full exploration, but a few points are relevant for present purposes.

Followership is not synonymous with discipleship. It involves, rather, a significant degree
of autonomy in the follower, a capacity to resist, and, in so doing, to impose costs on a
leader. It rests on active, dynamic decision-making. It involves conditional choice. Published
research on followership is mainly cast at the individual level and is dominated
by the work of psychologists, sociologists, and organization theorists.

The literature suggests that people follow leaders for three main reasons: utility, identity,
and values.¹⁹ When a utilitarian calculus is all that motivates followers, a leader needs
direct mechanisms of influence and intrusive means of surveillance. The leader must also
provide constantly recalculated reminders of the benefits of compliance. In contrast, when
identity motivates followers, a sense of belonging draws them in to repeated encounters
with the leader, the leader attracts more than demands, and there is an expectation of a
continuing two-way relationship. Finally, when values motivate followers, there is a
deeply shared perception of normative congruence, means and ends on both sides are
synchronically reconceptualized as the external environment changes, and a basic


¹⁹ See, for example, Liisa Välikangas and Akihiro Okumura, “Why Do People Follow?” *Leadership Quarterly* 8(3), 1997: 313-
337.
internalization occurs in any negotiation process. Stark lines around the authority of the leader begin to fade.

Drawing analogies in the world of international relations is an imperfect but suggestive exercise. The United States never had the autonomy or the capacity to be the undisputed ruler of the post-1945 system. But in the exceptional circumstances created by intervention in two world wars and in the subsequent struggle against communism, the American people came to accept the necessity of their state attempting to steer future global developments. Joe Nye famously asserted that the United States was "bound to lead." The really serious question is whether Americans can continue to be convinced of that. And here is where followership comes back in. Even contemplating the more complex environment George W. Bush will bequeath to his successor, it remains in the fundamental interest of others that Americans continue to lead. Followers wield an influence that will help determine whether they will do so. This is the essence of functioning hierarchical systems. Key followers, so-called middle-powers capable collectively of disrupting the system, of free-riding, or of contributing materially to system-maintenance, exert a critical influence in this respect.

It is plausible to argue that for most of the post-war period, the United States bore most of the costs of system maintenance and also reaped the largest share of the benefits. Utilitarian calculations among follower states could have underemphasized the former and exaggerated the latter. Conversely, it would have been in the narrow American interest to obfuscate both, certainly if a domestic consensus were to hold and if followers were to be convinced to move beyond strict cost-benefit calculations. The routine expectation of strictly reciprocal bargains would have made system stabilization and maintenance extremely difficult. When they functioned properly, international institutions built around the American political identity helped transcend utilitarianism. Beyond open markets, rule of law, and a basic commitment to participation in decision-making by both the authors and the targets of decision, key institutions like the IMF and the WTO evolved over time not only to push members beyond strict reciprocity in their dealings with one another, but also develop a meaningful sense of mutual accountability. Their day-to-day operations and their agreed dispute-settlement procedures, in fact, rested on notions of accountability as well as on decision-making structures that expanded the opportunities for followers to exercise voice. Despite what so-called ‘new sovereigntists’ say, by accepting associated obligations Americans never gave up their Constitution, but they did find ways to open the binding around that sacred text. As generations of students of

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international relations have learned, after all, they created a world of complex interdependence.

In consequence of the system they now led, even if their policymakers sometimes needed to deny it, the United States and its key follower states embraced what colleagues and I have recently labeled complex sovereignty. For its part, the United States did so deliberately, and it did so successfully, to encourage the reconstruction of political identities around the world—precisely to make the world safer for Americans. What it did not do successfully was to take the one further step of fostering durable followership based on value congruence. For a brief moment during the 1990s, Americans managed to convince themselves that the world shared not just certain procedural preferences but also their most basic values. If parts of the world still held out, they seemed to believe, then the manifold pressures of globalization would eventually force convergence. In this light, the United States pushed the international institutions it created too hard. And certainly after the debacle in the UN Security Council in the run-up to the Iraq War, it fomented a distinct retreat from value congruence and stimulated a new if variegated wave of anti-Americanism abroad. It is possible but not yet certain that subsequent actions, like extravagantly tightening borders in North America—a futile exercise if ever there was one, also began to erode seemingly entrenched identity-based motivations for followership. They might, indeed, be prompting a reversion to utilitarianism in increasingly desperate efforts to re-stabilize the hierarchical system. In turn, they might in the future make it much more difficult for Americans to shape the kind of world they actually want. Perhaps soon, their unintended consequences will make it impossible for American policymakers to manage the internal political task of convincing the American people themselves to continue bearing a disproportionate share of the costs of system maintenance.

On the other hand, the crises of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries could come to be associated with a dawning realization on the part of states and peoples that their destinies are now inextricably bound together and that therefore they must accept the inevitable task of constructing a global Leviathan to resolve the fundamental dilemmas implied by the existence of a global commons. If they eventually came together in a way that rendered collective power legitimate as well as effective at the global level, we could be certain that a key component of political authority in the modern world would have been reconstituted. But would this not be too hard a test? And indeed, is not thinking about it this way the very reason why opinions have become so inflamed, and rigid national sovereigntists resurgent?


Consider the essential challenge confronting the founders of the United States. In the aftermath of the Revolution, there was significant confusion about how political authority should be reconstructed. No one, however, argued that a true Leviathan was needed. Indeed, the very notion was anathema, even to proponents of a strong national government. Political authority itself would, in the end, wind up being subjected to a permanent contest. It would not, however, be rendered unnecessary. Order and efficient governance, the consensus among the American founders held, had to be balanced against fundamental expectations of liberty. Justice, moreover, would continually have to be discerned and reinterpreted in light of that ever-changing balance. In times of supreme national crisis, of course, order might trump liberty and simple justice might be deferred. The reconstitution of authority in the early United States, especially as it evolved in practice, allowed for such exceptional circumstances. Usually, however, the continuous recalibration of that balance was facilitated, not frustrated, by intentionally leaving political authority divided, deliberately obscuring the borderlines around it, and widening the possibilities for participation in its exercise. As it turned out, this penchant well suited the industrial economic system that would begin to arise during the next century.

So why should we now demand to see hard evidence of the emergence of a Leviathan at the global level before we concede that the notion of constructing and wisely reconstructing global political authority is at least a possibility. Of course, we can rule it out by definition, and be guided by our fears more than by our hopes. If the very nature of the international system is held to be radically anarchical, only the fleeting delegation of authority by sovereign actors can occur at the global level. At best, we might be able to imagine the emergence of a kind of primitive rule in an organic society of states, constantly calculating their narrow interests. Such views still constitute key elements of the core disciplinary paradigm within the international relations field, and much of research therein understandably highlights the fragile nature of international political authority. But are we not missing something important when we take that fragility to signal the end of the story?

Again, a fundamental purpose of the international organizations created after World War II was to encourage followership and thereby to render the burdens of leadership politically tolerable inside the United States. Their multilateral character accomplished this objective, even if their actual behavior sometimes eroded the bases of their support. Even now, in the face of so much acrimony, no insurmountable obstacle exists to the adaptation and improved operations of those organizations – from the Security Council of the UN to the Bretton Woods institutions and their analogues in other economic and social arenas. New and less formal institutions might also be shaped and rendered effective through a complicated process of social learning. If fully shared values can’t be

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recovered quickly enough, reconstructing a sense of shared identity, or shared fate, might be enough. Optimism in this regard becomes especially compelling after we subject the main alternatives to critical scrutiny: that national governments seriously believe their citizens are willing to bear the full costs of abandoning economic interdependence, that the politics of collaboration among states primed for cooperation has been superseded by the self-regulating discipline of markets, or that a commitment to collective security is no longer required to address the terrifying new threats posed by the proliferation of massively destructive weapons.27

Sixty years ago, Americans decisively turned away from romantic dreams of automaticity and self-help. Sometimes, they made their leaders pretend to be doing something else. The idea of rendering the sovereignty of their own state more complex and its boundaries more opaque began with them. Key states at the core of a globalizing industrial system followed. There exists no inexorable force to stop leaders and followers from attempting to retreat to the world of their dreams. But wisdom just might do the trick.

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27 Sobering, and perhaps indicative of the extent to which the Bush Administration had unhinged even normally steady American scholars, is the prognostication of Robert Jervis, who concludes his new book as follows: “The United States and others, then, face a difficult task. The collapse of the Bush foreign policy will not leave clear ground on which to build. Although the Security Community will remain, new policies and forms of cooperation will have to be jury-rigged above the rubble of the recent past.” Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*, London: Routledge, 2005: 137.