

**AN EMPIRE FOR YOU!  
AND SOMETHING FOR THE U.N.?  
Altay Cengizer\***

*The way the world's only remaining superpower chooses to conduct itself on the world stage and project its immense power and resources on the one hand, and the readiness and propensity of its allies and partners to appreciate its true security needs on the other, have become the two interconnected parts of the central issue of our times.*

*Faced with the vexing question of terrorism US was forced to review its security assessments, the result of which was a paradigm shift and the majority of its allies were not even given the time to begin the process of thinking about the value of adopting a corresponding paradigm, a response of their own. Both the US and France and others in this instance, failed to avoid bitter divisions resulting in collateral damage being inflicted upon not only the international system, especially with regard to the shape of the Security Council, but upon the NATO alliance as well. One the one hand was the US, with its unrelenting commitment to its new but unrefined paradigm and on the other hand was most of its European allies with no corresponding and modernized paradigms of their own; both lacked a sense of overriding concern and an understanding of their larger responsibilities and international obligations.*

*Relegating the traditional tools of diplomacy along with the international system to a secondary position does not prepare us for a safer world. Only preventive multilateral diplomacy has a better chance to forestall the escalation of disputes into outright conflicts. The UN system plays the most important role in this respect, not only because it can ensure an integrated approach that brings together all relevant factors of a particular conflict, but also because of its ability to confer legitimacy to such quests. Moreover, given the diversity of political interests and many other determining factors, not all countries can get involved in all disputes. The world has to agree on a process of burden-sharing, and it can only do so within the UN system. Right now, the UN is trying to address volatile situations before they erupt into full-fledged threats to peace and security.*

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\* Deputy Chief of Mission, Turkey's permanent delegation to the United Nations, New York. This article reflects the author's personal opinion.

*“If you proceed much further down the slippery slope, people around the world will stop admiring the good things about you. They’ll decide that your city upon the hill is a slum and your democracy is a sham, and therefore you have no business trying to impose your sullied vision on them. They’ll think you’ve abandoned the rule of law. They’ll think you’ve fouled your own nest. The British used to have a myth about King Arthur. He wasn’t dead, but sleeping in a cave, it was said; in the country’s hour of greatest peril, he would return. You, too, have great spirits of the past you may call upon: men and women of courage, of conscience, of prescience. Summon them now, to stand with you, to inspire you, to defend the best in you. You need them.”*

Margaret Atwood, the Canadian lady of letters, the fairest of the fairies, and no less an admirer of the United States than many, wrote the above “letter” to her “beloved America,” two weeks after the war against Iraq started.

The more worldly Will Hutton of *The Observer*, editor with Anthony Giddens of “*On the Edge*”, a best-seller in the year 2000, articulated the general feeling that capitalism has indeed become the universal social and economic order of our time, “*the postwar US that reconstructed Europe and led an international liberal economic and social order has disappeared completely.*”

The Commons leader and former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, said in his resignation letter to Tony Blair that it troubled him to know of no sister party within the European Union that shared the position of the Labour Party.

Chris Patten, the EU Commissioner for External Affairs, and former chairman of the Conservative Party, damned “*the emerging US reliance on its fantastic military superiority over all other nations to pursue what it wants as it wants*” as an “*absolutist and simplistic approach to the rest of the world that is ultimately self-defeating.*”

These are few of the many voices that were heaped upon the self-criticisms of countless respectable Americans from all walks of life. And, those cited above are Canadian and British, who were not entangled in this dispute in the same way as the French, Germans and others were.

If a Frenchman is to be quoted in this respect, a name that comes to mind is Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the legendary student leader of the 1968

riots in Paris, and the leader of the European Parliament's Green Party, who likened the Bush administration to the Bolsheviks! "*Your government,*" he retorted to no one other than Richard Perle during a recent debate in Washington, "*has been behaving like the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution. You want to change the whole world! Like them, you claim that history will show the truth is on your side. You want the world to follow the American dream!*"

It would have been worthy of his reputation if William Safire had had the good sense to check out what so many people from different backgrounds had to say about American behavior before he so eagerly issued his warnings to Turkey, and talked about the "*unforgettable sins*" of this ally, which until a few months before had provided leadership for the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul with more than 1400 troops, a quintessentially post 9/11 task. Likewise, it should not have been that difficult to predict the reaction of the Turkish public when their country's was described as "*not wanting to kiss on the first date*". These were the words of Aaron Brown, CNN's anchor, uttered just hours before the Turkish Parliament was called to vote on the stationing of American troops on Turkish soil, a decision then judged to be crucial to US planning. Apparently, such "*small things*" travel far nowadays.

In fact, throughout this campaign, the media has been an integral part of the war effort, and Turkey's image in the United States suffered terribly and unjustifiably, belittled by caricatures and foul and revolting language, while the most hypocritical lies passed themselves off as absolute truth. One of the worst of these was the myth that \$26 billion, an amount as much as the US Department of Education spends in a year, was to be handed over to Turkey as a "*donation*" with no interest, no repayment, and with nothing whatsoever attached to it! What was later agreed upon was an amount between \$4 to \$6 billion that was to be given to Turkey had the vote been in the affirmative to offset the country's losses that would have been directly incurred by the closure of its ports and airports. For other costs that would have definitely arisen from practically identifying itself as a direct party to the armed conflict, the real source of worry was an already beleaguered economy implementing an IMF program. The Turkish government could have used the former amount as collateral to seek credit of up to \$20 to \$22 billion from international money markets to be paid back in 7 to 15 years, albeit with more favorable rates than Turkey could have possibly obtained on its own.

Unfortunately, it takes time for the truth to erase the effects of what is repeated over and over in this jingled “*information age*,” and the Americans among others, seem to have a longer memory for the erroneous, stereotyped information, which is easier to indulge, harness and remember. The damage was done and the Turks are still remembered for haggling over the price tag! As for the French and the Germans, surely they too have come to understand how it feels to be at the mercy of ruthless media mongols ready to misrepresent constantly and cynically.

The United States needlessly offended many friends and allies in a highly counterproductive manner. As it happened, for the first time since the Vietnam War, its forces were engaged in a major military conflict without the support or even the acquiescence of several of America’s most important European allies. Now that the war is over, and the urgent task of creating the conditions necessary for lasting stability in Iraq becomes more pressing, those on both sides of the Atlantic who genuinely feel for and value amity and friendship, those who seek truly inspiring leadership with the awareness that a more secure, free and prosperous future hinges on our ability to act in concert within the international system realize that there has been too much avoidable collateral damage; too much exultation of raw power which only led to senseless, media-driven posturing. They are the ones who sense the need to dwell upon what went wrong.

The way the world’s only remaining superpower chooses to conduct itself on the world stage and project its immense power and resources on the one hand, and the readiness and propensity of its allies and partners to appreciate its true security needs on the other, have become the two interconnected parts of the central issue of our times. Although, the bi-polarity of two balancing powers vanished around 1991, there has been a false, and in many ways premature, debate about building a counterpoise to balance American power. The issue is rather about the quality and comprehensiveness of the leadership the United States provides from now on! Seen from that angle, it is so much more real and relevant for all of us; Americans and others, and for the future of alliances, multilateral diplomacy and international organizations.

Hugo Young, the respected columnist of The Guardian wrote about a “*wholly over-mighty ally; abusive of old friends, contemptuous of multinational diplomacy, scornful of the right of other nations to have their interests, indifferent to the need to do big things together rather than apart... This isn’t the natural American way... It imposes obligations that are intolerable.*”

Indeed, there is no question that the way the United States has been handling itself recently leaves much to desire. In spite of the towering intellects that help shape the modern world and the many fountainheads of knowledge and wisdom that grace its soil, it opened its heart to lesser promptings. For one thing, resorting to shallow slogans has not generally, if ever, been stylish in diplomacy, but it becomes even worse when it happens in America and starts ruling the waves in the most powerful nation on earth.

It is hard to ignore the continuing defense build-up, disdain for international arrangements and total disinterestedness in the “*soft*” aspects of security, all of which add up to a coherent ideological position on the part of the US. It is the style, more than anything else, in which this ideology is imbibed, pursued and implemented that causes anxiety and lead to concerns that the United States is exercising a sort of *imperium*. The Americans might not have been inspired by the empires of the past and they might not hold any imperialistic aspirations in the classical sense of the word. True, the United States neither seeks aggrandizement nor it is after constructing a formal, juridical, territorial empire. Rome collected taxes from around the world known to itself. The US does not and will not. However, there was also the phenomenon of what has been called “*informal empires*” and, certainly, the United States has a global influence that is widely disproportionate to a country which has less than 5% of the world’s population. It has military contingents in forty countries, and naval bases in ten. The Pentagon’s defense budget is now equal to the defense spending of the next twelve to fourteen countries combined. Even more significantly, the US now pays for almost 80% of the world’s military research and development. Given the existing imbalance of power in the world today, Mr. Wolfowitz was not out of his mind when he recently decided to set up a panel in Washington to advise him on the rise and fall of empires in the past, and why certain empires lasted so long.

How do the United States and the UN fit into this radically transformed international environment? Though the relevancy of this question has been obvious for some time now, it was really put on the table for debate during the long lasting negotiations at the UN Security Council concerning the use of force against Iraq. As flawed as the UN is in many ways, the failure to convince the Security Council in the run-up to the second Iraqi war, did not confirm the organization’s irrelevance. It merely showed that the relationships of the primary actors with the organization were at fault in differing degrees:

The seeds of discord were in fact sown when the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1441 on 9 November 2002 because the measures to enforce UN demands for disarmament in Iraq were left deliberately ambiguous. The resolution never set out a clear timetable for UN weapons inspections, or established beyond argument what constituted a “*material breach*.” The Americans thought that France was using that language to trap the United States in the UN, to make a war impossible. The French, however were convinced that the Americans were using the UN inspections only to mark time, and that President Bush had decided from the outset to oust Saddam Hussein by force. Indeed, most members felt from January 2003 onwards that the military timetable seemed to overtake the diplomatic agenda. Thus it was the widely understood absence of an imminent, as opposed to a potential danger that fuelled opposition to the conflict. The anti-war case was at its strongest in the assertion that containment, by and large, was working. It was probably in this context that a senior British diplomat told Mark Leonard, Director of the Foreign Policy Centre in London that “*the Americans have been trying to trade on our credibility in the world. But we don’t have any to give, we need it all for ourselves.*”

It is widely known that in the Council debates the French together with the Russians were at the forefront, but the important split that has developed in the Americas went unnoticed. Both of the US’s partners in NAFTA, Canada and Mexico, have broken with Washington over Iraq. Elsewhere in Latin America, the only sizable nation whose leadership backed Washington was Colombia, the third-highest recipient of US foreign aid after Israel and Egypt.

Sir Kieran Prendergast, Head of the UN Department for Political Affairs succinctly described how things got out of hand:

*“Faced with a choice between plague and cholera, the Security Council chose cholera. The plague would have been going along with a resolution that lacked internal credibility; cholera was to have open divisions in the Council, and go ahead with a military operation without Council authority. You always prefer cholera to the plague, because cholera is survivable and the plague much less so. There was a failure of diplomacy on all sides. If I compare what was done this year with the exercise of coalition-building that went on in 1991, I think it is not unreasonable to infer there was not the same effort put into it. There was an element of take-it-or-leave-it- either you are with us, or you’re irrelevant, because we’re going anyway.”*

Indeed, in 1991, the then Secretary of State, James Baker III toured the world to marshal a coalition though he had a much easier position

to explain given the flagrant aggression of Iraq against Kuwait. At any rate, the blame cannot be thrown one way. Certainly, the French declaration that they would veto any new draft to succeed 1441 without even seeing the text was unbecoming of the traditions of French diplomacy. Today, as the few months left behind allow a more detached analysis of what took place, many see that everyone had their share of blame and blanket accusations lead nowhere. Observers are critical of the fact that the atmosphere in the UN was allowed to sour by the frequent resort to full ministerial meetings of the Security Council, encouraging politicians to repeated public grandstands. The final futile efforts to agree on a second resolution seems to have been particularly damaging. At the end, the US decided to resort to use of force without the authorization of the Security Council, in fact without even reaching a majority, as negotiations broke down

It is still difficult to say that the debacle could have been avoided even if better style and foresight had dominated the deliberations at the Security Council. The problem runs deeper; in the fact it could be described as a radical tectonic plate shift in the wake of 9/11. For the US, the status quo came to represent inbred danger. Departing from this basic premise, the US arrived at a different set of security assessments seldom readily shared by others. Clearly, the US and a number of its important European allies went separate ways in their interpretation of the status quo.

More importantly, faced with the vexing question of terrorism that has struck on its own shores in the most blatant way, the US was forced to review its security assessments, the result of which was a paradigm shift and the majority of its allies were not even given the time to begin the process of thinking about the value of adopting a corresponding paradigm, a response of their own. There were only two choices: Either side with the US bereft, for the most part, of any respectable degree of public approval and risk being viewed as an opportunist, or risk confrontation. Had enough time been given to allies and partners to upgrade their existing security paradigms, they would have been empowered either to rejoin the sudden activism of the US with more faith and a better sort of public involvement, thereby rendering the US probably more amenable to their concerns or seek respectful disengagement. Instead, both the US and France and others in this instance, failed to avoid bitter divisions resulting in collateral damage being inflicted upon not only the international system, especially with regard to the shape of the Security Council, but upon the NATO alliance as well.

As late as June 12<sup>th</sup>, Donald Rumsfeld was telling the Belgians that they risked losing the right to host NATO if they did not rescind a law that has been used to accuse American officials of war crimes.

On the other hand, rejecting *a la française* -with German and Belgian help- Turkey's request for defensive patriot missiles, on the extremely cynical and abstract ground that "*it would have meant accepting a war footing,*" hence transporting the quarrel at the Security Council to the alliance level was foolish to say the least. Indeed, refusing the "*talk of war*" at even a conceptual level contrasted sharply with the concrete and real talk the Turkish Parliament was expected to make within a few weeks on the draft resolution, and such continental nonsense was surely among the several factors which further complicated the position of the Turkish Government vis-a-vis its electors which, for reasons of their own already worried about the impact of an American operation and were largely against allowing the passage of US troops anyway. That a Security Council resolution was not forthcoming did not simplify the task amid intense bickering on the legality of the approaching American operation.

One the one hand was the US, with its unrelenting commitment to its new but unrefined paradigm and on the other hand was most of its European allies with no corresponding and modernized paradigms of their own; both lacked a sense of overriding concern and an understanding of their larger responsibilities and international obligations. Therefore, what transpired at the Security Council represents much less the failure of the international system itself as it represents the failure of the relationships the main actors have developed over the years with the international body.

It has been greatly unfortunate that this chasm came to being in a world where three billion people, half of the human race, live on less than \$2 a day. Unbelievably, two thirds of them still make up the middle classes of humanity because the lot of the rest who have to live on less than a dollar a day is even worse. Well over a billion people have almost nothing: no safe drinking water, no education to speak of, no medical treatment or other basic services and not enough to eat. In 2003, two billion people -one third of the world population- has no electricity. Where is the *elan vital* Bergson talked about a hundred years ago, or are we being forced to finally accept that only the richest and the strongest have the right to seek the replenishing forces of life? What as yet unknown dangers and diseases with strange names lurk at the bottom of this deepening abyss that the upper crust continues to ignore?



**In no modern society do the rich have the sole authority to make decisions. G7+1 cannot speak on behalf of the international community, but the UN has at least a moral legitimacy to do so. This is why, whenever the United Nations is demonized, this scorched earth moves an inch closer to perdition.**

**Indeed, though it has many shortcomings, how can so many well-to-do and knowledgeable people be oblivious to the perils of deprecating the only universal organization at a time when the threats we commonly face are much more diverse and complex than those of the past? Although the new American paradigm seems to put the use of force at the center of their world view, thereby subordinating the well-known considerations of international economics to questions of hardcore security, few of the challenges thrown up by today's hard facts can be solved by force nor they can be kept away by creating gated-communities. On the contrary, we will need better functioning, all-inclusive arrangements if for no other reason than the fact that it is the only way to provide equity for entire regions that lack the means to handle today's challenges.**

**Relegating the traditional tools of diplomacy along with the international system to a secondary position does not prepare us for a safer world. Only preventive multilateral diplomacy has a better chance to forestall the escalation of disputes into outright conflicts. The UN system plays the most important role in this respect, not only because it can ensure an integrated approach that brings together all relevant factors of a particular conflict, but also because of its ability to confer legitimacy to such quests. Moreover, given the diversity of political interests and many other determining factors, not all countries can get involved in all disputes. The world has to agree on a process of burden-sharing, and it can only do so within the UN system. Right now, the UN is trying to address volatile situations before they erupt into full-fledged threats to peace and security.**

**It is an illusion, and a dangerous one to think that many growing problems can safely be resolved without the agencies of the UN. Take the example of Security Council Resolution 1483, for instance: It bestowed, upon what is called "*the authority*" in Iraq, a comfortable degree of legitimacy, and sanctioned the process which seeks to establish an interim administration in that country. This should have been a welcome development for the US which has achieved little catharsis in Iraq apart from revealing the extent of the killing fields of the dictator. Indeed, the United States can wage and fight wars without allies, but for the rest of the agenda partners and allies are critical!**

**These are among the many reasons why it would be bad for the UN and the world if this organization had to deal only with those issues nobody else wanted to deal with; what the former French Permanent Representative, Ambassador Jean-David Levitte described as “*the province of orphan conflicts,*” meaning those which are terribly serious for the those involved but not serious enough for the US and others who have the power to do something about them. To put it more bluntly, Levitte meant those conflicts which are not seen as important in geo-strategic terms. However, the UN is not a collection of relief agencies and it cannot work if it is seen to be one. Whatever the range of choices available to itself, and its capacity to act alone, the US can still choose to be the senior partner of this organization which evidently needs to be redesigned. The US, instead of fostering exceptionalism, can turn multilateralism into a powerful tool, and look beyond the threat of terrorism to work together at the international level on those larger threats which no single nation, including itself, can reliably address on its own.**

**Edward Luck, Director of the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University pointed out that the mere fact that it possesses the world’s largest economy and the greatest range of global interests may make the US the single biggest beneficiary of the stabilizing role that the UN plays, though it could play this role better. After all, it was US technology that has shrunk the world into a global village, and in the wake of 9/11, the reality of global interdependence should have been understood by Americans like never before. We are living in a world that is in many ways, America’s creation.**

**The UN has not been rendered irrelevant not only because the world is already beleaguered by so much misery and poverty that it cannot be expected to endure much more, but also because there are many vital tasks around the world that the UN is equipped to perform, as well as an abundance of potential conflict situations arising from all sorts of disputes. There simply is no other forum that brings everyone together. We must see that in the absence of a level playing field, globalization unleashes all sorts of forces, and it would be naïve to suppose that it will by itself eradicate the radical divides we are faced with. The number of instances in which the global interest evolves to become also the national interest continues to grow, as many national interests are often more effectively pursued within a rule-based order.**

**Abidoun Williams, Head of the Strategic Planning Unit at the Office of the Secretary General reminds us that people generally have a**

romantic view of the past and tend to assume the worst in the midst of a crisis, forgetting to take the long view.

For instance, The Suez Crisis, among many others, posed a tremendous challenge for the UN: the two permanent members of the Security Council conducted an operation directed at the largest African country, an Arab country. The crisis also precipitated a major financial crisis. In fact, from the very beginning, even when the ink on the Charter was barely dry, people were already predicting the demise of the UN. It has been able to overcome many crises, and it will overcome the present one for the same reasons: Its founding principles and the faith defining what it stands for are sound and more relevant than ever! As long as the foundations are strong the house can be renewed, and the UN house is indeed in dire need of repair. The structure of the UN, the Security Council, and the membership of the Council, at least the permanent membership of it, reflects the end of World War II in a way that is no longer appropriate for today's concerns. The house can endure to respond to the great challenge of harmonizing and balancing the needs and interests of billions of people in a shrinking world.

If we set aside the zealots of different colors, the whole world felt like it was part of America on 9/11, and fully shared the feelings of anger and injustice. However, the grief and trauma that ensued in the aftermath of that tragic day led the Bush administration to leap from pre-emption to prevention in its strategic thinking. Whereas preemption is widely accepted and implies imminence, the United States now stretches the concept of imminence to include preventive war, accompanied by the loss of a sense of working multilaterally. This is the main reason why the questions of legitimacy and acting in concert jumped so dramatically to the forefront. Preventive war has to be multilateral and as many eminent Americans and others keep reminding us, power that is legitimized is far more effective.

Going it alone can destroy many aspects of soft power and its ability to attract, which is the real strength of the US in dealing with the manifold and lasting challenges of today. *"Force is not a privilege some enjoy and law the alibi of others,"* Dominique de Villepin said in his address to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London on March 27. His words describe the conundrum: How are we going to ensure that we will not be hiding behind international law in face of sheer danger, and be able to understand at the same time that sheer force is not the only answer to every ill that besets our world?

More often than not, resistance to US power seems to be the driving impulse. Whether or not it gathers force depends more than anything

else on the choices the US is about to make. The American body politic can take care of such issues before Europe and others can. Many in the States and Europe, having already drawn their conclusions, want to pull back from such sterile and misguided confrontation. Once the United States starts to devote more time to persuasion and respect the legitimate security interests of its allies and partners while allowing them time to develop their own paradigms to reflect their thought-out response to the fundamental change initiated by itself, it will be giving the right answer to what it has been seeing as prickly anti-Americanism.

On the other hand, just as the rest of the world needs to understand where American foreign policy impulses come from, America itself needs a better understanding of how reasoned individuals elsewhere view and interpret its policies. It is time for all to discard the many forms of cynical self-righteousness that has been so dominant lately. Attempted marginalization, even talk of "*punishment*" of those who fell by the wayside at the end of what has been a false debate, rewards jingoism and is more becoming of an empire rather than a pre-eminent country with unparalleled power which the majority of the nations of the world in fact look upon for enlightened leadership.

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