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New Research Agenda? Yes. New Paradigm? No.

Scholars of international relations continue to debate whether the events of September 11 necessitate a major rethinking of the field's main paradigms. Although no consensus has emerged on this issue, there is a tendency – perhaps »urge« is a better word – to believe that such a paradigm shift is necessary. This urge arises from two sources. First, the events of September 11 evoke a sense of shock, and this shock produces an emotional inclination to believe that the developments of that day have therefore changed international politics in a fundamental way. Second, September 11 has induced policy makers in the United States to embrace a paradigm shift in the principle and practice of US foreign policy, a shift embodied in the new US national security strategy and manifest in the »war on terrorism«. This change in policy has naturally encouraged scholars of international relations to believe that a requisite change is needed in the field's main intellectual frameworks.

I contend in this essay that September 11 necessitates no such paradigm shift. All the major questions facing scholars prior to September 11, and the analytic perspectives used to address those questions, continue to be relevant today. To be sure, a host of new and urgent questions should now be on the scholarly agenda – questions that I identify below. But these are questions that broaden our research agenda rather than ones that require a fundamental reconsideration of the foundations of that agenda.

I use the term »paradigm« to refer to the foundational theoretical and conceptual perspectives that scholars self-consciously employ to analyze international politics. (Policy makers often employ them as well, but rarely in a self-conscious way.) My claim is not that the existing array of mainstream theoretical perspectives – realism, liberalism, constructivism, and their variants – is adequate or complete in any absolutist sense. On the contrary, the field of international relations has much room to grow. However, I do not believe that the events of September 11 make our current paradigms any more lacking than they were before the developments of that day.

1. No Paradigm Shift

I base this assessment on the claim that the events of September 11 have not fundamentally altered the nature of international politics. Despite assertions of a new clash of civilizations, no new geopolitical fault-lines have been created. Despite optimism that the threat of terror would serve as a durable source of unity among the great powers, managing relations among the world's main centers of power still remains a vital challenge. Indeed, September 11 has done more to divide than to consolidate the Atlantic Alliance. Rather than changing the underlying dynamics of

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international politics, the events of September 2001 have only added the need to combat terrorism to an already long list of priorities – but traditional priorities and paradigms remain as relevant as ever.

Furthermore, I contend that scholars of international relations should actively *resist* the inclination to presume that September 11 has fundamentally altered global politics. To shift paradigms would be to grant the perpetrators of September 11 a major success. One of Al-Qaeda's objectives was to provoke a defining confrontation between the Islamic world and the West – to induce practitioners and students of international relations to embrace a paradigm shift, which then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is precisely what has happened among US policy makers. Rather than shifting priorities and tactics to address the threat of terrorism, US practitioners have predicated policy on a new paradigm – one in which the effort to fight terrorism has become the defining and consuming mission for America. As a result, fundamental suppositions about the nature of the international system have changed. American policy makers now maintain that US preeminence and unilateralism are key sources of stability, challenging realist thinking about the impact of unipolarity on structural dynamics. Washington has been dismissive of, if not openly hostile to, international institutions, disregarding the liberal claim that they are essential to cooperation. The United States has also turned its back on allies, trumping constructivist faith in the durability of a cohesive Western identity.

American policy makers have thus come to believe that the international system has changed much more than it has, holding a view of a global landscape that bears little resemblance to that envisaged by the rest of the world – and one that challenges the mainstream paradigms in the field of international relations. The adverse consequences of this fundamental gap in perceptions, and of this failure to adhere to the insights of scholarship, are readily apparent – a deeply divided international community, a costly and bloody US occupation of Iraq, rising anti-American sentiment on a global basis, and America's isolation in the world.

The community of international relations scholars should not make the same mistake as the community of US policy makers. On the contrary, scholars need to provide long-term perspective and serve as voices of centrism and moderation – especially amid the polarized political atmosphere. They should serve as a ballast of reason and rigorous argumentation at a time when both are in short supply.

This assessment is by no means meant to dismiss the significance of the events of September 11; new and difficult challenges face policy makers and scholars alike. In particular, the Bush administration's concern about the dangerous nexus of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and rogue nations is a very real one. Washington is right to put this issue at the top of the international agenda and to suggest that the preventive and preemptive use of force may be necessary to deal with related threats. This new reality requires updating existing norms about the use of force – and scholars can make an important contribution in this area. It should also be noted that if terrorist groups do gain access to nuclear weapons and resort to their use, a paradigm shift in the field of international relations would be necessary. This develop-

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ment would call into question our understanding of deterrence, the consequences of power asymmetries, and other core concepts within the field.

2. *New Research Questions*

Although September 11 does not necessitate a paradigm shift, it does confront international relations scholars with a set of new and pressing questions. These additions to the research agenda, which are not meant to exclude others, fall into five main areas: Weak States and Failed States; Religion and International Politics; Terrorism and Its Impact on Great Power Behavior; Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Benign Hegemony; and Reframing the Atlantic Link.

Weak States and Failed States

The study of underdeveloped states has generally been the domain of comparative politics. Scholars of international relations, and in particular of international security, have tended to neglect the study of weaker states precisely because their weakness limits their impact on international politics. The primary exception would be the study of civil and ethnic conflict – to which underdeveloped states are prone. But for the most part, such research focuses on the internal causes and consequences of such conflict, rather than its impact on the broader international setting. September 11 has given weak and failed states much more import and prominence. Since the attacks on New York and Washington, Afghanistan and Iraq have been at the center stage of international politics. The conflicts in these countries and the tasks of post-war reconstruction have been the dominant issues shaping relations among the great powers, challenging the effectiveness of international institutions, and demanding the international community's attention and resources.

These developments have several consequences for the field of international relations. They challenge the general supposition that structure (the distribution of power) is the most important factor shaping the international system. Managing relations among concentrations of power is no less important than it used to be, but major threats to stability may now emerge from states or regions that possess little material power. This shift necessitates a rethinking of traditional notions of hierarchy and asymmetry. The emergence of more potent asymmetrical threats also requires directing more intellectual and political capital toward failed states that could become centers of activity for non-state, terrorist groups. These developments necessitate a reconsideration of existing approaches to the use of force. Prevailing international norms, as enshrined in the UN Charter, generally treat the use of force as legitimate only when such action takes the form of self-defense against aggression or is approved by the UN Security Council. The security threats posed by weak or failing states may necessitate new forms of humanitarian intervention or even preventive war. The scholarly community, and international legal scholars in particular, can help update prevailing norms and principles to these new circumstances.

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The security threats posed by weak and failed states may at times require the use of force, as in Afghanistan. But the challenges they pose often can be best addressed through non-security measures. In this sense, dealing with the threats emerging from such states solely in a traditional security framework will address only the symptoms of the problem, not its causes. Scholars of international relations can help advance other policy avenues – such as economic development, political liberalization, and education – that can help prevent failed states from emerging to begin with. In this sense, international relations scholars may want to renew efforts to reach out across disciplinary boundaries as well as to promote better links between area studies and international relations.

Finally, September 11 and its aftermath have made clear the need for systematic study of military occupations and the challenges of nation-building. If the international community finds itself more frequently engaged in stabilizing weak and failed states, it will need a firmer analytic foundation upon which to base its policies. In preparing for the occupation of Iraq, the United States turned to studies of post-World War II Germany and Japan. The analogy was a weak one, however, perhaps one of the reasons that US forces were unprepared for the chaos that followed the fall of Saddam Hussein. Recent experiences in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere provide scholars with critical case studies for grappling with a host of important questions. Should pre-war elites and military personnel be retained to help establish post-war stability, or should they be excluded from political life? What standards should be used in assessing when to return effective sovereignty from the international community to local officials? What mix of coercion, co-optation, and persuasion has proved most effective in maintaining order? To what degree do international institutions confer legitimacy on post-war occupations and thereby help build support for foreign authorities and troops among the local population? Scholarly exploration of these issues would help guide policy makers in ongoing and future instances of post-war governance and reconstruction.

Religion and International Politics

Al-Qaeda and like-minded groups pose a threat not just to the security of states whose citizens and territory they attack, but also to the prevailing international order. Their immediate goal is to induce the West to withdraw from the Islamic world, ostensibly enabling Islam to flourish by ending its repression and pollution by outsiders. But Islamic groups like Al-Qaeda also challenge the legitimacy of the main constitutive unit in the world – the secular nation-state. Rather than supporting the separation between church and state, Islamic radicals believe that the state should promote Islam and be guided by *Sharia*. Legitimacy derives from religious authority and practice, not from representative government. For extremists, nation-states in the Islamic world are fictive creations of European colonizers, established to undermine the unity of the Muslim people. The advancement of this vision, were it to come about, would constitute a radical alteration of the international system and necessitate a major rethinking of prevailing paradigms (cf. on these issues Philpott 2002).

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Al-Qaeda's agenda and vision are unlikely to prevail. The events of September 11 have, if anything, strengthened the traditional nation-state by forcing it to tighten its grip on political life at home and abroad. And Al-Qaeda's ability to operate has been considerably degraded by the toppling of the Taliban and ongoing military and non-military countermeasures. Nonetheless, the emergence of religiously-motivated groups willing to use violence to challenge the Westphalian order does confront international relations scholars with important challenges. Can these groups and the networks through which they operate be examined through existing approaches in the field – such as those of epistemic communities or transnational issue networks (cf. Haas 1992; Keck/Sikkink 1998)? Can the study of international politics in the pre-Westphalian era illuminate contemporary international politics in the Islamic world? Inasmuch as the Protestant Reformation was a turning point in the gradual separation of political life and religious life in the Christian world, what historical insights can be gleaned for the Islamic world?

Accompanying these analytic questions is a number of prescriptive questions. If it is absolutist religion – not religion per se – that challenges the prevailing international order, what steps can be taken to promote pluralism in the Middle East? Inasmuch as the rise of a middle class helped limit the political power and ideological allure of the church in Europe, what can be done to broaden the middle class in Islamic societies? Studying the role of public education and social mobility in promoting pluralism in early modern Europe might also provide useful guidance on how education, literacy, and economic opportunity could achieve the same in the modern Middle East.

Terrorism and its Impact on Major Power Behavior

Scholars of international relations have yet to examine adequately the impact of the threat of terrorism on great power behavior. Initial studies of this issue suggested that terrorism would be the new unifying threat, serving as a foundation for great power harmony. According to G. John Ikenberry, the impact of September 11 would be to push the United States »back toward a more centrist foreign policy« that »stresses alliances [and] multilateral cooperation,« thereby providing »new sinews of cohesion among the great powers« (Ikenberry 2001/2002: 19f). Such assessments, however, have proved off the mark. The events of September 11 and their aftermath have done more to divide than to unite the international community, with America's unilateralist urge strengthening rather than abating. The US-led war against Iraq was particularly divisive, especially among the Atlantic democracies.

Several factors appear to be at work. Although terrorism potentially poses a threat to all countries, terrorists single out specific targets when they strike. The targeted country then has a stronger incentive to strike back than others, one of the main reasons that victims of terrorism usually retaliate on their own. The United States is also a more likely target than other countries due to its primacy and its presence in the Middle East, leading to further differences in threat perception and strategies of response.

The elusive nature of the threat of terror also adds to its divisive impact. Al-Qaeda and other perpetrators of terrorism are usually non-state actors, making them diffi-

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cult to find and to counter through the use of force. The clear link between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda won the United States widespread international support for the war in Afghanistan. But the absence of a convincing link between Saddam Hussein and the events of September 11 denied Washington such support for the war in Iraq. Looking forward, the scholarly community should devote increased attention to exploring what impact the ongoing threat of terrorism is likely to have on great power behavior and how it might be possible to effect greater cooperation and cohesion among the liberal democracies.

Scholars of international relations should also engage in systematic study of how terrorism affects the foreign policies of targeted countries. Many initial assessments compared the events of September 11, 2001 with those of December 7, 1941, the day Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor. Both events were deemed to awaken America's internationalist fervor, ensuring its steady engagement in meeting threats and providing global leadership. As one commentator remarked: »We have been put on notice that every major Western city is now vulnerable. For the United States itself, this means one central thing. Isolationism is dead«.[1]

On the surface, this assessment appears to be accurate. Since September 11, the United States has demonstrated unprecedented resolve to use its power as it sees fit, the isolationist forces that were gaining steam during the 1990s having been abruptly reversed. But it would be premature – as well as historically inaccurate – to presume that terrorism as a matter of course evokes a determined brand of internationalism. On the contrary, terrorism does have the potential to induce great powers to turn inward (cf. Kupchan 2002: 219-230). Terrorist attacks against British targets in Palestine and Aden helped convince London to terminate its colonial presence in the Middle East. Terrorist strikes against French targets similarly convinced Paris to withdraw from Algeria. Prior to September 11, attacks against Americans in Lebanon (1983), Somalia (1993), and Yemen (2000) induced the United States to withdraw its forces, not to take the fight to the perpetrators. Washington has shown no lack of resolve since the events of September 11, but it may be that the war in Iraq represents a turning point and that the costs of occupation will induce the United States to turn inward.

From this perspective, the scholarly community should place particular emphasis on exploring the impact of terrorism on the domestic politics of foreign policy. This new type of threat is unlikely to evoke steady engagement in the same way that the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany did. Instead of facing identifiable enemies against which to mobilize the nation, terrorism represents a far more shadowy enemy. Instead of asking Americans to make sacrifices for the war effort or to alter their behavior when the alert level is raised, officials continue to urge the electorate to go about their daily routines lest the threat of terror succeed in disrupting normalcy. The long-term effect of terrorism on internationalism thus warrants careful study.

1 Sullivan, Andrew 2001: America at War: America Wakes up to a World of Fear, in: The Sunday Times, 16. September 2001.

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Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Benign Hegemony

Perhaps the most significant change in international politics since September 11 stems from its impact on US politics and foreign policy. The attacks gave birth to a new US doctrine of preeminence and preemption. The Bush administration also stepped away from the multilateralist course to which the United States had adhered since World War II, opting instead for a bristly unilateralism. These changes in both principle and practice have in turn altered international perceptions of US power, calling into question the notion of benign or liberal hegemony (Kupchan 1998) and creating the prospect that other nations may on a regular basis resist rather than rally behind US leadership (cf. Kupchan et al. 2001; Ikenberry 2001).

One set of important questions for examination concerns the causes and the durability of this shift in US policy. It may be that Washington's extremist turn is a temporary aberration caused by George W. Bush and his team of advisers, and that a different leadership would bring a course correction. Several observations lend credence to this perspective. A relatively small coterie of advisers – the neoconservatives – has been in control of policy. This group does not represent the political mainstream, but has held sway in Washington largely because America's system of checks and balances has been in suspension since September 11. Amid the »war on terrorism«, neither centrist Republicans nor Democrats were willing to challenge the president on matters of national security. As the neoconservatives lose their privileged position – in part due to the inaccuracy of their predictions for post-war Iraq – and as America's public discourse recovers, US policy may move back to the moderate center.

At the same time, there are reasons to believe that more durable, secular changes have contributed to the new course of US policy. Future terrorist strikes, or merely the threat of them, could keep the US public on edge, favoring more extremist voices and hampering the return of a more variegated political discourse. The populist overtones of the Bush administration resonate strongly in the agrarian south, mountain west, and southwest – the fastest growing regions of the United States. Support for unilateralism thus may gain steam across the political spectrum. In addition, America's political landscape is becoming more polarized, making it difficult to rebuild a bipartisan coalition behind liberal internationalism.

Whether temporary or more durable, the new trajectory of US policy is already having a powerful impact on the dynamics of unipolarity. The scholarly community needs to begin addressing a host of issues. Has the notion of liberal or benign hegemony become obsolete? In light of the asymmetrical distribution of power in the international system, how might balancing against the United States manifest itself? What impact will growing anti-American sentiment have on other nations' foreign policies toward the United States?

Reframing the Atlantic Link

The literature on alliances and security community has dominated scholarly work on transatlantic relations. In light of the erosion of relations between the United States

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and Europe over the past several years, it may well be time to apply a new conceptual framework and vocabulary to Atlantic issues. Transatlantic differences over Iraq made clear that US and European security are no longer indivisible. America and European members of NATO are in nominal terms still allies, but NATO is losing its relevance as a formal military alliance. The United States has made clear its preference for coalitions of the willing. In addition, its strategic priorities have shifted away from Europe and its forces are following. For its part, Europe possesses a limited willingness and capability to stand alongside the United States in missions outside Europe. The EU is also embarking on the establishment of its own defense capability.

The Atlantic area still represents a security community – war across the Atlantic remains beyond the realm of the thinkable. But the notion of security community also connotes a sense of we-ness, a shared identity. That sense of we-ness is currently at risk, with officials in Europe frequently calling for Europe to rise as a counterweight to the United States and European publics seeing America as a threat to international stability, not a benign hegemon. Some Americans have come to see Europe as an impediment and Washington is rife with talk of the need to »disaggregate« the EU and foster divisions within Europe that will work against its unity.

The scholarly community needs to address both descriptive and prescriptive questions. On the descriptive front, how should these changes in Atlantic relations be understood? Will the Atlantic zone remain a formal security community – in the sense that war remains unthinkable – but nonetheless witness the return of balance of power dynamics on a moderate level? Do relations among the liberal democracies during the 1920s or 1930s provide a useful model? On the prescriptive front, scholars need to address how to avert the further deterioration of Atlantic relations. How and under what circumstances do security communities unravel? What specific steps can be taken to reclaim Atlantic harmony? Answers to these questions will both expand our understanding of contemporary international politics and help to ensure that the Atlantic community does not become a permanent casualty of the events of September 11.

3. Conclusions

Addressing the questions enumerated above will require theoretical innovation and painstaking empirical work. This new research agenda will accordingly keep scholars of international relations busy for quite some time. These questions are, however, ones that can and should be examined primarily through existing paradigms in the field. Research located at the intersection of competing paradigms and at the meeting point of the field of international relations and comparative politics holds particular promise of advancing this new agenda. Our paradigmatic approaches *should* change as the field evolves. But that change should come as part of a natural intellectual evolution, not as a precipitous over-reaction to the events of September 11.

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