

Contesting hegemons: US–French relations in the ‘New World Order’

JAMES PETRAS AND MORRIS MORLEY

Abstract. International relations is now marked by a distinct bias against both realism and materialism. This, allied to the currently fashionable notion that in a globalized, liberal economy cooperation rather than competition is the norm, has meant that few scholars have been concerned to analyse the sources of rivalry between the various capitalist states. This article suggests that a version of realism informed by a keen sense of power and hierarchy remains essential if we are to understand the dynamics of US foreign policy in the post-Cold War period. The case study deployed here revolves around the various attempts made by one of America’s allies to contest Washington’s vision of a ‘new world order’. The French challenge assumed many forms but in the end was seen off by the dominant state; the outcome only confirming US preponderance and guaranteeing its hegemonic position into the 21st century.

Introduction: beyond realism?

Scholars in international relations have conventionally assumed (and have certainly told their students until recently) that the subject in which they are engaged evolved through a series of ‘great debates’, the greatest of all being the one that occurred in the late 1930s and early 1940s between realists and idealists. After a good deal of intellectual struggle—not to mention World War II and the onset of the Cold War, both of which shaped the future of the discipline as much as debates within it—the discussion finally resolved itself in favour of the tough-minded realists leaving the utopians and the idealists to contemplate their fate. ‘The rout’, as Wilson has noted, was so complete that it led to what some think of as a Kuhnian-style paradigm shift that shaped the evolution of international relations as a discipline for at least two generations.¹

This particular version of the history of the discipline has come under considerable attack of late. The ‘great debate’ we are now told probably never took place; realism was never quite as dominant as some once thought; and even some of the key theorists of realism like E.H. Carr were not one-dimensional realists at all, but thinkers with a powerful moral outlook.² What has also come under attack of course has been realism itself. Indeed, the attempt to rethink the history of international relations was never entirely innocent, but was in its own way a less than subtle attempt to dethrone what many saw as the unfortunate dominance of a

¹ See Peter Wilson, ‘The Myth of the ‘First Great Debate’’, *Review of International Studies*, 24:5, Special Issue (December 1998), p. 1.

² See Ken Booth, ‘Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice’, *International Affairs*, 67 (1991), pp. 527–45.

particular methodology that privileged the state and ignored its own conservative prejudices. Certainly, since the end of the Cold War, realists in general have come under severe bombardment from a new batch of international relations writers. Though by no means united in outlook or viewpoint, the critics all seemed to be agreed about one thing: the subject had to change its focus. In many ways, it already has. Thus, today, few analysts appear to study the state and the conflict between states, but concentrate instead on nearly everything else such as norms, culture, identity, international regimes and various non-national threats to global security. For some, the notion that entities known as states even have clearly defined sets of interests is now considered somewhat odd.³ Others also point to the increasingly important role played by international institutions, the implication being that even if states are not unimportant they are far less important in an international system now organized around multilateral bodies like the UN, the IMF, NATO and the EU. Finally, there is the phenomenon of globalization whose underlying logic, it is suggested, has led to a hollowed-out state without political purpose or economic function. And so it goes on: the message is clear. Realism, with its preoccupation with the distribution of power and competition amongst states, is *passé*.

The backlash against realism is no doubt understandable given its association with the *status quo* in the Cold War. But we should recall that there were different forms of realism and not all were uncritical of US foreign policy; and many realists using realist criteria were very much opposed to what America did after 1947—including of course the intellectual architect of containment himself, George F. Kennan.⁴ Moreover, the case could be made (and is made here) that a qualified form of realism is not only useful, but actually essential if we want to understand the operations of one particularly important state in the international system: the United States of America. But to do this we first have to look beyond the narrower definition of political and military power to incorporate a concept of economic interests; we also have to embed our analysis of American relations with the outside world within a conception of hegemony. This other unfashionable concept is, we believe, central to any serious analysis of what is normally referred to as US foreign policy. Indeed, we would attribute enormous importance to US hegemonic ambitions, and specifically to the hegemonic project that has underlain its foreign policy in the 1990s—and will do so for many years to come.⁵

What constitutes global hegemonic power has been the subject of considerable debate in recent years. For some scholars, it is largely defined by 'political leadership and strategic vision', a sense of 'national purpose', and the ability to hold sway in

³ 'The politics of identity/difference flows beneath, through and over the boundaries of the state', in William Connolly (ed.), *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. ix.

⁴ The classic exposition of the realist theory of international politics is Hans J. Morgenthau, *Power Among Nations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993). Also see Richard Falk, 'The Realist School and Its Critics', in L. Carl Brown (ed.), *Centerstage: American Diplomacy Since World War II* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990), pp. 365–81. For an application of the realist paradigm to twentieth century American foreign policy, see Normal A. Graebner, *America as a World Power: A Realist Appraisal from Wilson to Reagan*. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1984.

⁵ See Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half Century*, 2nd edn. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1995), and Christopher Layne and Benjamin Schwarz, 'American Hegemony: Without an Enemy', *Foreign Policy*, 92 (Fall 1993), pp. 5–23. See also Bruce Cumings, 'America: Hegemonic Still', *Review of International Studies*, 24:5, Special Issue (December 1999).

the world of ‘ideas’.⁶ For others, the debate centres around the relative merits of military strength versus economic power as indicators of hegemony in the marketplace-dominated world of the late twentieth century. Still others would prefer a more Gramscian approach which focuses less on the role of a particular state, than the maintenance of a much wider set of economic rules, fashioned by a transnational class, whose aim is the reproduction of its own legitimate rule.⁷ Our approach is perhaps less Gramscian than ‘realist with materialist characteristics’ and argues instead that states do matter, and that relations between the leading capitalist states continue to be characterized by conflict. Moreover, though we may well live in a very different world to one that existed in the interwar period—war between the great powers is now highly unlikely—we still inhabit a world of hierarchically arranged states with different preferences about the way in which the world system ought to be organized. And not all states, including the French state, have been happy with the way in which the world has been organized by the United States and have attempted to resist this, so far rather unsuccessfully.

Our discussion of the resurgence of US hegemonic power in the 1990s also calls into question globalization theorists who postulate an increasingly interdependent world in which sovereign nation-states are losing their capacity to influence interstate relations.⁸ We contend that, on the contrary, the dominant capitalist states today are the main protagonists of globalization, and that multinational corporations remain firmly anchored in the nation state and depend on home governments to support, expand and safeguard their overseas business activities.⁹ We argue that to focus primarily on the notion of ‘interdependence’ in order to theorize about the organization and distribution of power in the post-Cold War international system provides a less adequate understanding of these processes than an approach based on analysing the reassertion of US hegemonic power.

From regional power to global hegemon: an overview

One of the great international ‘stories’ of the twentieth century—if not the greatest—is the rise of the United States from a dominant regional power within a

⁶ See, for example, Joseph N. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Henry R. Nau, *The Myth of America's Decline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), especially pp. 3–49.

⁷ See the discussion in James Petras and Morris Morley, *Empire or Republic?* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. ix–xvi.

⁸ Martin Carnoy, ‘Multinationals in a Changing World Economy: Wither the Nation-State’, in Martin Carnoy et al. (eds.), *The Global Economy in the Information Age* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), pp. 45–96; Vincent Cable, ‘The Diminished Nation-State: A Study in the Loss of Economic Power’, *Daedalus*, 124:2, Spring 1995, pp. 23–33; Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁹ For arguments challenging the erosion of the power of the nation-state proposed by many globalization theorists, see Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalization in Question* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); Linda Weiss, *The Myth of the Powerless State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Robert J. Holton, *Globalization and the Nation-State* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), especially pp. 80–107; Michael Mann, ‘Has Globalization Ended the Rise and Rise of the Nation-State?’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 4:3 (Autumn 1997), pp. 472–96. Also see a challenging set of essays on the relationship between US multinational corporations, the US state and domestic US enterprises in Ronald Cox (ed.), *Business and the State in International Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

European-centred capitalist world economy in 1898 into the most powerful imperial state of the late twentieth century. This complex and prolonged process (in large part facilitated by two world wars and the Cold War) eschewed direct political control in favor of utilizing growing economic power to create an informal empire: during the first three decades of this century, the United States promoted its global aspirations through an 'open door' policy for trade and investment in areas such as Asia and the Middle East where competition was greatest and a 'closed door' approach in regions like Latin America where it had established itself as the pre-eminent outside economic power.

The Second World War produced irrevocable changes in global capitalism, specifically the decline of the most formidable prewar imperial states and the emergence of the US as the world's dominant superpower. From an 'outsider' supporting the process of European decolonization, the US now assumed the role of 'insider' heading up a Western anticommunist coalition. Over the next two decades, America's uncontested political, economic and military power guaranteed a high degree of cooperation on the part of its senior European allies. In the late 1960s, however, the hegemonic position of the US began to weaken under the combined impact of the costs of prosecuting the Vietnam war and the rising economic power of Western Europe and Japan. Efforts by the Reagan administration in the 1980s to halt America's relative global economic decline and recreate the golden age of the 1950s failed precisely because the assumptions on which the policy was based no longer existed.

At the end of the 1980s, US policymakers announced that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of its Eastern European sphere of influence had ushered in a 'New World Order' or what some Washington ideologues described as a 'unipolar' world. Today, however, the victors in the Cold War—the United States included—are being forced to grapple with the consequences of their success: the resurgence and intensification of intercapitalist rivalries—political, military and economic. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union and Asian communist countries opening up their economies to market forces, all the restraints on intercapitalist economic competition have been lifted; and the principal challenge to the US global position no longer comes from the Communist bloc; the world market has become the new battleground, with allies and former enemies seeking to carve out new spheres of influence and domination at the expense of each other. Large-scale investments and exports enabled a reunified Germany to quickly establish itself as the dominant capitalist power in Eastern and Central Europe. The proliferation of regional blocs and agreements (NAFTA, Maastricht, ASEAN, etc.) reflected efforts by the leading capitalist countries to consolidate power centres that would enable them to reach out into the larger world economy.

By the late-1990s, the US remains dominant—perhaps more so than ever—but its efforts to subordinate key allies to its global leadership has had to contend with a new international reality, a world in which the pursuit of global market share has displaced the Cold War as the principal terrain of conflict and competition. The world of the grand coalition to confront the Soviet Union has been transformed into a new geoeconomic world of proliferating rivalries and challenges as Washington's various 'allies' have sought more aggressively to pursue their own agendas. And while the US still managed to get its own way on most issues, there was no hiding the fact that beneath the façade of post-Cold War harmony in what John Ikenberry

has termed our ‘liberal order’, the competition for power, influence and market has gone on. Moreover, although the various states engaged in this rivalry were nominally equal, one alone—the United States—was hegemonic: objectively so, consciously so, and determined to remain so. Of course, it might seek to maintain this position of preponderance in alliance with others—as it also did during the Cold War, by using various ‘multilateral’ institutions, and even by supporting human rights within a framework of ‘low intensity democracy’. But this doesn’t change the basic story. Hegemony comes in all shapes and sizes.

The Bush-Clinton global framework

Reaffirming America’s position as the dominant world hegemon has been the openly declared goal of the two US administrations since the end of the Cold War. The Bush White House, for instance, was intent on recreating a world of uncontested US power, in the process subordinating the ambitions of competitor allies to American interests, defining their roles on a global scale and within regional spheres. In large part, this ‘politics of domination and subordination’ strategy was built around the retention of military superiority over its capitalist competitors, a willingness to project power in regions of contention, unilaterally or with *ad hoc* coalitions, and a deepening of alliances, especially in the Third World, with internationally-oriented capitalist sectors.

The most systematic and explicit statement of the strategy of US global dominance was formulated in a February 1992 document entitled ‘Defense Planning Guidance for the Fiscal Year 1994–1999’ prepared by an inter-agency collaboration between the State Department and the Pentagon in conjunction with the National Security Council, and in consultation with the President Bush and his senior foreign policy advisors. The document described the post-Communist, post-Gulf War period as a unique opportunity for global empire building. It cited a ‘new international environment’ which reaffirmed ‘US global leadership’ and ‘integrated’ (subordinated) competitor allies Germany, France and Japan into a ‘collective security’ system under US leadership.

The DGP was quite explicit regarding the need to avoid the development of any European security organization that could supplant NATO, thereby profoundly diminishing Washington’s authority over the continent: ‘While the United States supports the goal of European integration, we must seek to prevent the emergence of European-only security arrangements which would undermine NATO, particularly the alliance’s integrated command structure’.¹⁰

The Clinton administration’s strategy of ‘enlargement’ closely mirrored the Bush policy framework of global leadership. ‘Only one overriding factor can determine whether the US should act multilaterally or unilaterally, and that is America’s interests’, National Security Council Advisor Anthony Lake told a Johns Hopkins

¹⁰ All excerpts from DPG reprinted in Patrick E. Tyler, ‘US Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop’, *New York Times*, March 8, 1992, p. 14. For a sharply differing interpretation of the Bush foreign policy, see Terry L. Deibel, ‘Bush’s Foreign Policy: Mastery and Inaction’, *Foreign Policy*, 84 (Fall 1991), pp. 3–23.

University audience in September 1993.¹¹ NATO was deemed still ‘fundamental for preserving our security’¹²; and in early 1994, the President and his Secretary of State called for a greater application of NATO military power to enforce regional stability in post-Cold War Europe in order to ‘to vindicate United States leadership of the Western Alliance’.¹³ Some two and a half years later, as Clinton’s first term drew to a close, senior foreign policy officials were still telling audiences that ‘the need for America’s global leadership is more important than ever’.¹⁴

These strategic objectives espoused by Bush and Clinton policymakers provide an essential background and context for examining the US-France relationship in the mid-1990s. To a greater or lesser degree, they are reflected in all of the conflictual situations that have characterized the post-Cold War bilateral relationship. Examining America’s attempts to undermine France’s pretensions to be a rival offers some particularly revealing insights into these politico-military and economic conflicts that are so much a part of the ‘New World Order’.

‘Nationalists’ vs ‘hegemonists’: the nature of the rivalry

One of the key historic divisions in postwar Europe has been that between the ‘Atlanticists’ and the ‘nationalists’, the distinction centering around the nature of the relationship pursued with Washington. The ‘Atlanticists’ have been traditionally willing to accept a subordinate position within the US-directed world order while seeking, or in return for, a privileged secondary role. The most obvious example of this has been the United Kingdom with its frequently referred-to, often-derided but all-too-real ‘special relationship’ with the US. The most high profile ‘nationalists,’ on the other hand, not least France’s Charles de Gaulle, have been driven by a different vision of Euro-American relations, one in which Europe pursued a more independent foreign policy while at the same time reconstructing their former colonial empires in the image of the US informal empire in Latin America.

In France today, as in the past, the ‘nationalists’ are in the ascendancy. The government of Jacques Chirac repeatedly indicated its determination to resist US domination of Europe while pursuing policies that reflected France’s continuing global aspirations. Sometimes described as ‘De Gaulle II’, Chirac attacked ‘American hegemony’ and the Clinton administration’s ‘unilateralism’ in world affairs.¹⁵ At the Denver G7 summit of leading industrial nations in mid-1997,

¹¹ Anthony Lake, ‘From Containment to Enlargement’, 21 September, 1993, reprinted in US Department of State, *Dispatch*, 27 September, 1993, pp. 658–64.

¹² Warren Christopher, ‘Nato and US Foreign Policy’, 26 February, 1993, reprinted in US Department of State, *Dispatch*, 1 March, 1993, p. 120.

¹³ Warren Christopher, quoted in Daniel Williams and Ann Devroy, ‘US Bombing, Credibility Linked’, *Washington Post*, 22 April, 1994, p. A1.

¹⁴ Nancy E. Soderberg, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, ‘The Continuing Need for America’s Global Leadership’, 17 October, 1996, reprinted in US Department of State, *Dispatch*, 28 October, 1996, p. 541. For an interesting account of the hegemonic aspirations manifested in US foreign policy during the first Clinton administration, see David P. Calleo, ‘A New Era of Overstretch?’, *World Policy Journal*, 15:1, Spring 1998, pp. 11–25. See also Michael Cox, *Superpower without a Mission? US Foreign Policy After the Cold War* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995).

¹⁵ Quoted in Charles Trueheart, ‘US and France: A Study in Rancor’, *Washington Post*, 14 December, 1996, p. A22.

French denunciations of White House efforts to impose its social and economic ‘model’ on Europe were restated in equally blunt language. Newly-elected socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin also accused the United States of ‘a certain tendency toward hegemony’, while Chirac was privately scathing of the American approach: ‘We’re wasting our time here. We’re nothing but extras in Clinton’s marketing plan. [The Americans] have already decided to do everything without us’.¹⁶

Clinton policymakers responded in kind, dismissing such sentiments and France’s own foreign policy goals as the totally unrealistic posturing of a declining global power. ‘The French have a complex that drives them to see the United States as an obstacle to their wish to play a greater role in the world’, observed one senior administration official. ‘They have not accepted the fact that the United States is the most powerful country in Europe’.¹⁷ Given these verbal jousts, it is not surprising that the historically fractious bilateral relationship has persisted into the post-Cold War era. The first area in which this jousting took place was in the former Yugoslavia.

The break-up of Yugoslavia

With the demise of the Cold War, France once again revived the idea of an independent European security system from which NATO would be excluded from playing an active role, thus weakening or blunting Washington’s military authority over its key Alliance partners. The disintegration of the multi-ethnic, nation state of Yugoslavia gave Paris the opportunity to translate this objective into practice. Having played a major role in bringing the war about, the Western Europeans, under French and British leadership, sought to impose a settlement that took account of the existing territorial fragments that resulted from the ethnic conflict. For France, in particular, this was a testing ground for European independence. The strategic issue was whether the European powers were capable of establishing their own security system, that is, a military force commensurate with their new economic power. Washington quickly recognized what was at stake in any successful European-led diplomatic/military operation: a loss of leverage over key allies and the enhancement of a continental-based ‘security system’. The Clinton administration response was to do all in its power to undermine any settlement that excluded US politico-military ‘leadership’.

The US strategy revolved around redefining the Yugoslav conflict as a Bosnian-Muslim conflict, and demanding a settlement based on totally unrealistic concessions to the latter which guaranteed that the war would continue and that no European-brokered initiative, led by Paris and Whitehall, would succeed. For example, Washington successfully undermined the Vance-Owen plan which recognized the *de facto* ethnic territorial divisions and more or less divided Bosnia according to rival ethnic populations. Dismissing acceptance of the plan by Bosnian

¹⁶ Jospin and Chirac quoted in ‘Jospin Raps US “Hegemony” Bid at G7 Summit’, 24 June, 1997, *Reuters News Service*. Also see Dominique Moisi, ‘The Trouble With France’, *Foreign Affairs*, 77:3, May–June 1998, pp. 97–9.

¹⁷ Quoted in Thomas W. Lippman, ‘In Friction and in Friendship, US Retains Bond With France’, *Washington Post*, 27 October, 1996, p. A29.

Serbs and Croats, the White House claimed that it would require ground troops in a nearly impossible enforcement action and that it ratified the gains achieved by the Serbs through ethnic cleansing.¹⁸ In the belief that the US would 'soon offer a better deal', Bosnia's Muslims also opposed the plan.¹⁹ France and other European governments vigorously opposed a subsequent US decision to 'train and equip' the Muslims.

The US counter-offensive effectively blocked an independent European military strategy, ensuring that NATO would play the dominant role in imposing a settlement of the conflict. French officials accused Washington of sabotaging EU efforts to maintain its power on the continent seeking to provoke 'competition' between NATO and the EU.²⁰ The November 1995 Dayton peace agreement, brokered by the White House, provided for the reassertion of NATO supremacy under US leadership—American generals largely in command of a 60,000 strong occupying army composed mainly of NATO forces. The Europeans, meanwhile, were relegated to the subordinate role of leading the economic reconstruction effort.²¹ Based on peace through *de facto* partition which legitimated ethnic distributions of power, the terms of the agreement reflected Washington's successful containment of French regional aspirations.

NATO: a greater European role?

Apart from the Yugoslav conflict, NATO has also been a battleground between Washington and Paris over appointments to senior civilian and military positions within the organization. During late 1995, for instance, the US vetoed the candidacy of former Netherlands Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers to become NATO's new Secretary General. France, who together with England and Germany, had publicly supported Lubbers, responded by blocking Washington's 'acceptable' candidate, the former foreign minister of Denmark, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, a vociferous critic of French nuclear testing in the Pacific. Ultimately, the position was filled by a compromise candidate, the Spanish foreign minister Javier Solana.²² However, the fracas over this appointment was mild compared with the more long-running disagreement between the US and France over the latter's possible return to membership in NATO's integrated military command.

The Chirac government consistently linked France's return to full membership to a 'renovated' NATO that will lead to 'the emergence of a real European defence identity'.²³ The principal French demand is for the appointment of a European

¹⁸ Elaine Sciolino, 'US Declines to Back Peace Plan as Balkan Talks Shift to UN', *New York Times*, 2 February, 1993, p. 9.

¹⁹ Thomas Friedman, 'US Will Not Push Bosnia to Accept Bosnia Peace Plan', *New York Times*, 4 February, 1993, pp. 1, 11. Also see David Owen, *Balkan Odyssey* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995).

²⁰ See Paul E. Gallis, *France: Current Foreign Policy Issues and Relations with the United States*, Report to Congress, 26 September, 1996. Library of Congress: Congressional Research Service, p. 13.

²¹ See US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Peace Process in the Former Yugoslavia*, 104th Congress, 1st Session, 17 October and 1 December, 1995 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1996), p. 28.

²² See Marlise Simons, 'NATO Picks Spanish Foreign Minister for Secretary General', *New York Times*, 2 December, 1995, p. 5.

²³ 'France, US Square Off in Alliance Power Play', *The Australian*, 19 February, 1997, p. 8.

officer as commander of NATO’s southern command forces (AFSOUTH) based in Naples. The Clinton administration has remained steadfast in its refusal to relinquish control of AFSOUTH, not only because it included the US Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean but also on the grounds that Congress would never accede to the idea of a European taking charge of this command.

While France, with the backing of Spain, Germany and Italy, refused to budge from its basic demand for European leadership of NATO regional commands, Defence Minister Charles Millon announced in early 1997 that his government was willing to be flexible over the timing of a European’s appointment to take charge of the southern command. Simultaneously, France proposed a compromise solution that would split the Naples-based command, giving a US admiral control over air-naval projection forces and a European the responsibility for land based forces. Neither offer produced a positive response in Washington.²⁴ A Pentagon official bluntly rejected the latter suggestion: ‘There will be no shared authority’ over the southern command forces, a position subsequently repeated by the White House.²⁵ During her February visit to a number of European capitals, the newly appointed US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told a Rome news conference that this was not an issue for debate: ‘Our position on AFSOUTH has not changed. We consider it essential for that to remain an American command . . .’.²⁶

If France remains wedded to the ‘Europeanization’ of the NATO alliance as the *quid pro quo* for its return to full membership it has nonetheless gone out of its way to avoid any ‘showdown’ with the US that might precipitate a serious rupture in ties between these two Alliance partners.²⁷ Such a reluctance led some commentators to question the Chirac government’s real priorities when it challenged the American role in NATO. To Daniel Singer, Europe, and especially France, ‘[was] not questioning US leadership of the alliance; it [was] seeking a better position within the hierarchical structure’.²⁸

In June 1997, President Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin agreed on the need for ‘a better balance of responsibilities between Europeans and Americans’ before France could envisage a greater role in NATO’s military structure.²⁹ But if a formal return to the integrated military command was still linked to a satisfactory resolution of the AFSOUTH issue, France nonetheless began to increase its military role in NATO during 1998, including participation in Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) exercises.³⁰ Washington’s intransigence eventually forced Paris to abandon its pursuit of the AFSOUTH command although French officials continue to argue that other senior posts be filled by Europeans and for a greater European influence within the NATO decision-making structure.

²⁴ ‘France’s Millon Says NATO Command Issue Tests US’, 3 January, 1997, *Reuters News Service*; ‘Clinton Calls Chirac on NATO, Russia Ties’, 30 January, 1997, *Reuters News Service*.

²⁵ Quoted in ‘US Will Not Share Nato Command, Pentagon Says’, 28 January, 1997, *Reuters News Service*.

²⁶ ‘Transcript: Albright, Dini Press 2/16 Briefing in Rome’, *US Information Agency*, Washington, DC, 18 February, 1997.

²⁷ Quoted in Craig R. Whitney, ‘French-American Ties Mostly Untied, for Now’, *New York Times*, 10 November, 1996, p. 1–12.

²⁸ Daniel Singer, ‘The Real Eurobattle’, *The Nation*, 23 December, 1996, p. 22.

²⁹ Quoted in ‘France Says Conditions Not Ripe for NATO Return’, 2 July, 1997, *Reuters News Service*.

³⁰ Bernard Edinger, ‘France to Step Up Military Role in NATO’, 21 January, 1998, *Reuters News Service*.

As part of this continuing effort to create a counterweight to Washington's strategic vision for NATO, the French government also vigorously contested the American conception of NATO 'enlargement'. In the debate over the first round of admissions in mid-1997, Chirac and Jospin insisted that Romania and Slovenia were at least as qualified to join the Atlantic Alliance as Clinton's choices of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.³¹ The White House demurred, and got its way, despite a confidential NATO military assessment which described Hungary and the Czech Republic as 'thoroughly incompetent'. If this was the only issue, one senior NATO official commented, 'we'd be taking the Poles, the Romanians, and probably the Slovenians'.³² For Washington, however, 'dependable' Eastern European allies serve the more important political purpose of bolstering its hegemonic status on the continent.

When debate over a second round of admissions, scheduled for April 1999, began, France again promoted the cases of Romania and Slovenia. It also signalled its opposition to a common budget increase, which requires the approval of all NATO members, to pay for enlargement. Whether this bargaining chip would influence the attitude of the dominant hegemon remained to be seen.

Africa: contesting 'spheres of influence'

Throughout the Cold War, Washington tacitly accepted French hegemony in its former African colonies. With the end of the Cold War, all that has changed. And perhaps the most striking illustration of Clinton's determination that no area of the world is off-limits to the US is his recent strong overtures to the Francophone African countries.

In early October 1996, the US began targeting Africa with a White House decision to approve a plan to organize, train, equip and help deploy an All Africa Crisis Response Force of 10,000 troops, ostensibly to intervene in regional crises that posed a major threat to civilian populations. Not surprisingly, the French response was decidedly cool, perceiving the plan as the beginnings of an attempt to undermine its position in a traditional 'sphere of influence'.

Later that month, while touring the region, Secretary of State Warren Christopher spoke of a Clinton administration 'determined to intensify American engagement in Africa'. Taking direct aim at France, he criticized its attempt to maintain 'exclusive patronage' on the continent in the post-Cold War era: 'The time has passed when Africa could be carved into spheres of influence or when outside powers could view whole groups of states as their private domain'.³³ Other US officials, meanwhile, accused Chirac of trying to 'recreate the French empire' in the

³¹ See 'France to Stay Out of NATO Military Wing for Now', 3 July, 1997, *Reuters News Service*.

³² Quoted in David Fairhall, 'The Incompetent Brigade is Enlisted to Swell the Ranks', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 July, 1997, p. 11. For an interesting argument stressing the need 'to create a stronger European substructure among its membership, and redefine its enlargement policy toward the east with a more explicitly European approach' if NATO is to continue playing a constructive role in helping solve future European crises, see Karl Kaiser, 'Reforming NATO', *Foreign Policy*, 103 (Summer 1996), pp. 128-43.

³³ Quoted in 'Christopher Defends US Role in Africa', 12 October, 1996, *Reuters News Service*; Thomas W. Lippman, 'Christopher Urges Greater Role in Africa', *Washington Post*, 13 October, 1996, p. A43.

guise of ‘De Gaulle II’. In Paris, the US Ambassador Daniel Simpson announced that ‘France is no longer capable of imposing itself in Africa . . .’.³⁴

In the following months, America’s push to carve out a sphere of influence and new markets in Africa at the expense of France showed no signs of decelerating. To the Elysée Palace, US support for the Tutsi dominated regimes in Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda was further evidence of Washington’s ‘displacement’ strategy. Still smarting from the toppling of its Hutu ally in Rwanda in 1994 by a Tutsi-led insurgency based in English-speaking Uganda, the perceived American support for rebel forces attempting to overthrow the Mobutu kleptocracy in Zaire simply fuelled French anxiety about Clinton’s African goals.

In early April 1997, Washington publicly indicated that its longstanding Cold War ally in Africa had finally outlived his usefulness: Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs George Moose characterized the Mobutu regime as ‘bankrupt’ and ‘a thing of the past’.³⁵ Soon after, the White House dispatched United Nations Ambassador Bill Richardson to personally inform the Zairian leader that it was time to ‘move on’.³⁶ From the US perspective, regional political stability, a prerequisite for exploiting lucrative new markets and investment opportunities, and signing free trade agreements with area governments, demanded a regime change in Zaire.³⁷

A reluctance to jettison a close ally whom French officials continued to describe as ‘the man in the best position to represent his country’,³⁸ combined with a fear about future US ambitions in Africa, initially provoked the Chirac government to take measures to prop up Mobutu’s rule. These included a major covert operation, involving the provision of combat aircraft and mercenary troops.³⁹ By mid-March, 1997, the growing support for Laurent Kabila’s rebel movement forced Paris, however reluctantly, to accept the inevitable. With its policy now being increasingly overtaken by events, Chirac decided to support a United Nations-mediated peace plan to solve the conflict.

Against this background, a major Africa policy shift began to take shape. Acknowledging that the era of unilateral intervention to prop up regional clients was over, Chirac and Jospin agreed on cutting back the French military presence in Francophone Africa. At the same time, they took new initiatives to expand France’s political and economic ties with the non-Francophone English-speaking nations, especially South Africa. Elysée officials downplayed any suggestion that Washington’s Africa strategy posed a fundamental challenge to French interests, especially in Francophone Africa where France is the largest aid donor and trading partner,

³⁴ Quoted in ‘France and US in War of Words Over Africa’, 15 October, 1996, *Reuters News Service*; Howard W. Lippman, ‘French Power In Africa Under Attack On all Sides’, *New York Times*, 6 December, 1996, p. 11.

³⁵ Quoted in David B. Ottaway, ‘US Seeking Resignation of Mobutu’, *Washington Post*, 9 April, 1997, p. A1.

³⁶ Senior US official quoted in Steven Erlanger, ‘US Decides Time Is Ripe to Elbow Mobutu Aside’, *New York Times*, 30 April, 1997, p. 15.

³⁷ See Laurent Zecchini, ‘Washington’s Dollar Diplomacy in Africa’, *Guardian Weekly*, 8 June, 1997, p. 13. In recent years, American investors have ‘discovered’ the spreading market economies of Africa, attracted by the possibilities for making large-scale profits despite the risks involved. See Frank Smyth, ‘A New Game: The Clinton Administration on Africa’, *World Policy Journal*, 15:2 (Summer 1998), pp. 82–3.

³⁸ Jacques Chirac quoted in Francis Cornu, ‘Paris Backs Down on Outside Force for Zaire’, *Guardian Weekly*, 30 March, 1997, p. 14.

³⁹ Raymond Bonner, ‘France Linked to Defense of Mobutu’, *New York Times*, 2 May, 1997, p. 6.

major source of investment and employment, and still retained an extensive, if downsized, military presence. Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine's criticism of the US 'trade not aid' approach at the time of Clinton's March 1998 visit to Africa, reflected France's determination to contest efforts to undermine its power and influence within the region while simultaneously accommodating itself to the new reality of intercapitalist competition in its historic sphere of influence.⁴⁰

Middle East: competing for influence

While the Clinton administration launched a major diplomatic offensive to undermine French power in Africa, it revealed a similar determination to block Chirac government attempts to carve out a greater role for Europe, principally France, in Middle East diplomacy—largely at Washington's expense. As a result of its pre-eminent ties with Israel, and its success in weakening Arab nationalism such that Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian leadership accepted America's role as the main overseer in the 'peace process', the White House has been able to effectively marginalize Europe as a diplomatic 'player', thus excluding it from a significant role if and when the region is stabilized.

The French President's October 1996 Middle East trip was fundamentally about competing with the US for influence and leverage in the region; about pressing for a greater European role in the US-dominated peace negotiations. His most visible diplomatic gesture aimed at reinserting Europe, and particularly France, into the ongoing negotiations was his declaration of support for a Palestinian state.

Washington's response to Chirac's tour of Israel and various Arab capitals was decidedly unfriendly but relatively low keyed. Although White House and State Department officials worried that he might complicate US mediation efforts, they did not regard Chirac's pronouncements as an attempt to challenge America's position as the key outside arbiter of the peace process. The Netanyahu government's hostility toward the French leader further allayed any real concern about France becoming 'a threatening competitor'.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the Clinton administration moved quickly to blunt any likelihood of an enlarged European or French political role by accelerating its own mediation efforts, including mild criticism of Israeli resistance to, or footdragging over, implementation of the US-brokered accords. Meanwhile, the January 1997 Hebron-West Bank land deployment agreement merely served to reaffirm Washington's role. According to senior US officials, both Israeli and Palestinian leaders only signed after the White House agreed to arbitrate any future obstacles or disputes that might arise.⁴²

In late August 1997, Chirac renewed his call for France to play a more active role in reviving the stalled peace process. Foreign Minister Vedrine concurred, describing the US approach as too 'passive'.⁴³ Through mid-1998, there were more proposals

⁴⁰ See 'France Wants Aid to Follow Clinton's Africa Trip', 15 April, 1998, *Reuters News Service*; Charles Trueheart, 'France Revises African Relationship', *Washington Post*, 6 February, 1998, p. A40.

⁴¹ Quoted in 'US Sees No French Threat to its Mideast Role', 25 October, 1996, *Reuters News Service*.

⁴² See Thomas W. Lippman, 'Accord Assures Continued US Role in Middle East', *Washington Post*, 16 January, 1997, p. A26.

⁴³ Quoted in 'Paris Says Washington Too Passive in Middle East', 28 August, 1997, *Reuters News Service*.

for a new Mid-East peace conference and criticism of discrete Israeli policies, including Chirac’s statement at the beginning of June that Israel must unconditionally withdraw from Lebanon in accordance with UN resolution 425 (which put him at odds with Washington who welcomed Tel Aviv’s decision to accept 425 with conditions). At no point, however, did French policy pronouncements imply a challenge to the US mediator role in the peace process.

But if the White House was able to limit France’s attempt to significantly reinvolve itself in Middle East politics, these efforts were not particularly helped by Paris’s new interlocutors in the region: countries such as Syria and Iraq previously linked more closely to Moscow than the West; and Iran which was locked in a major dispute with US oil clients, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Algeria: Islamics and oil

Ever since the Algerian War of Independence, Paris and Washington have contested for political influence and economic gain in this oil-rich North African country. The bloody and violent conflict now engulfing Algeria provoked renewed frictions linked to the pursuit of these historic goals.

In 1991, the military-backed regime headed by retired general Liamine Zeroul annulled the results of the first round of nationwide multiparty elections in which the biggest vote gainer was the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). The decision to cancel the second round of voting in January 1992, which the FIS appeared certain to win, triggered an Islamic-led insurrection and an increasingly savage cycle of killings and counter-killings. Fearful that an FIS political victory would lead to the establishment of an Iran-type regime, the Mitterand government threw its wholehearted support behind the secular military rulers. The Chirac government has since followed suit.

The Clinton administration initially supported the Paris decision to align itself with Algeria’s military regime. But, as the conflict deepened, a growing perception began to take hold among senior US policymakers that the generals running Algeria were slowly losing ground to the FIS armed guerrillas such that the overthrow of the regime could no longer be dismissed out of hand. In early 1994, the White House signalled a subtle, but unmistakable, policy shift: it began urging President Zeroul and the National Liberation Front government to negotiate with the ‘moderate’ elements among the FIS leadership or risk the total collapse of the regime. Meanwhile, US diplomats began establishing contacts with exiled FIS members who were described as opposed to the armed insurrection option when it was announced in response to the cancellation of the January 1992 elections.⁴⁴

In Paris, the Chirac government was dismayed by Clinton’s action. The *Washington Post* reported that Algeria became ‘a topic of almost every recent French-American meeting’.⁴⁵ After a Washington meeting with Secretary of State

⁴⁴ See Daniel Williams, ‘US Shifts Approach to Algeria as Islamic Movement Builds’, *Washington Post*, 19 May, 1994, pp. A31, A35.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. A35.

Christopher in mid-May, at which this issue was again discussed, a palpably dissatisfied and annoyed French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe told a news conference that American attempts to distinguish between 'moderate' and 'terrorist' Islamic leaders in Algeria amounted to a fundamental misconception of the nature of the FIS movement: 'there might be an Islamic representative in Algeria with whom one could talk but overall the movement is "extremist, terrorist, anti-European and anti-Western"'.⁴⁶

Throughout 1994 and early 1995, US officials continued to hold low-level discussions, mostly with European-based Islamic opposition leaders, while simultaneously warning Algeria's rulers, and by extension France, that a refusal to negotiate with opposition groups, including the FIS, would ultimately doom the regime. The repressive solution had not, and would not, work, said a senior American official in March 1995. The military strategy 'has failed, and the failure is more obvious every month'.⁴⁷ What particularly disturbed Washington was the threat to US global interests posed by the most radical elements of the FIS ultimately winning the brutal conflict in Algeria, the odds on which would continue to shorten the longer a negotiated solution could not be reached. 'If the Algerian situation deteriorates to full-scale civil war or Algeria becomes a hostile Islamic revolutionary state, [its large military] forces could rapidly complicate US military operations worldwide', Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Bruce Riedel told a House subcommittee in late 1995. 'Simultaneously, the chaos could rapidly spill over into neighboring states, destabilizing North Africa and possibly southern Europe'.⁴⁸ This theme of negotiating with the Islamics to avoid a radicalization of the insurrection was raised again a little over a year later in a Rand Corporation study commissioned by the US Department of the Army. The report concluded that in the absence of national elections, Algeria was 'condemned to continuing widespread violence, paralysis and radicalization of its political forces'. On the other hand, early elections, an FIS victory and the establishment of an Islamic-led government 'may be uncongenial to the West, but is unlikely to fundamentally threaten Western interests'.⁴⁹

In part, US policy in Algeria has been driven by economic ambition: to displace French investors from the lucrative oil and gas sectors of the Algerian economy. During 1996 alone, the American oil multinationals, Arco and Andarko made investment commitments totalling \$1.6bn.⁵⁰ Bechtel, the world's largest private corporation, has also established a major presence in the area through its involvement in the construction of a pipeline to transport natural gas from Algeria to Europe via Spain. Political stability and a greater opening to the market are essential preconditions for consolidating and expanding this US investment stake in Algeria.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Ibid.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Robert S. Greenberger and Thomas E. Ricks, 'As Algeria Splinters, US Weighs Options', *Wall Street Journal*, 13 March, 1995, p. 13. For a discussion of the choices confronting Washington at this time, also see Andrew J. Pierre and William B. Quandt, 'Algeria's War on Itself', *Foreign Policy*, 99 (Summer 1995), pp. 144-8.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Thomas W. Lippman, 'US Stakes Are High, Expectations Low, in Algeria's Impending Election', *Washington Post*, 1 November, 1995, p. A26.

⁴⁹ Excerpts from Rand study quoted in 'Army Report Sees Eventual Collapse of Algerian Government', *Washington Post*, 12 January, 1997, p. A27.

⁵⁰ See Roger Cohen, 'In Algeria, Oil and Islam Make a Volatile Mixture', *New York Times*, 28 December, 1996, p. 1.

Free trade vs extra-territoriality

France and the rest of Europe have been locked in a blazing conflict with the Clinton administration over the latter’s efforts to bludgeon its closest allies to subordinate their global economic policies to Washington’s foreign policy imperatives. The specific targets have been US subsidiaries and foreign companies trading with, or investing in, Cuba, Libya and Iran.

Both the Mitterand and Chirac governments have refused to buckle to US pressures to terminate normal political and economic relations with Cuba. On the contrary, Paris has welcomed Fidel Castro to its shores and forcefully rejected American efforts to intensify its global economic war against the Caribbean nation. France (and Europe’s) determination to maintain and even expand its politico-economic relations with Cuba has, in effect, served to complicate Washington’s effort to create a homogeneous US-dominated ‘free market’ zone in Latin America. To a degree, French regional policy, as reflected through its Cuba ties, is replicating US policy toward Francophone Africa: encroaching on the informal empire of a competitor nation.

The latest US initiative over Cuba that has enraged its Alliance partners is the so-called Helms-Burton law of March 1996 which extends the doctrine of extra-territoriality into areas that were not even contemplated at the peak of US efforts in the 1960s to destabilize and topple the Cuban Revolution. Two of its provisions in particular have galvanized France and the rest of Europe into action: one that allows US nationals and companies to sue foreign companies with investments in American-owned properties in Cuba that were taken over by the revolutionary regime after January 1959; the other that denies entry into the US of senior executives of those companies that ‘traffic’ in such ‘confiscated’ Cuban properties.⁵¹

French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette described Helms-Burton as ‘directly contrary to the rules which govern international trade’ while Trade Minister Yves Galland announced that France would not only participate in European Union (EU) reprisals against the US, but also take measures of its own in the event ‘French firms were hit ...’.⁵² Together with other European governments and Canada, France refused to accept this attempt by Washington to compromise its sovereignty. In April 1997, dismissing White House criticism, Paris signed a bilateral accord with Havana protecting the interests of French companies investing in the island.⁵³

Political and legal issues aside, France cannot condone Helms-Burton constraints on the overseas movements of its multinational enterprises or merchandise flows because it would establish a dangerous precedent, encouraging Washington to pursue similar policies against countries where Paris’s economic involvement far exceeds its stake in the Cuban economy. And, in fact, this is precisely what the US is seeking to do through its more recent efforts to limit French and other competitors’ access to lucrative investment and trade opportunities in Iran and Libya.

⁵¹ On the provisions of Helms-Burton, see Mark P. Sullivan, *Cuba: Issue Brief*. Library of Congress: Congressional Research Service, 13 May, 1997.

⁵² Charette quoted in Sarah Helm, ‘EU Threatens Trade Wars Over Anti-Cuba Laws’, *The Independent*, 16 July, 1996, p. 10; Galland quoted in *CubaInfo*, 1 August, 1996, p. 2.

⁵³ Craig R. Whitney, ‘Ignoring US, France Signs Accord Protecting Cuba Ties’, *New York Times*, 26 April, 1997, p. 3.

While Helms-Burton imposed sanctions on foreign companies and their executives doing business with Cuba, the US Congress passed other legislation which promised to further extend Washington's extra-territorial 'reach' and undermine basic free trade principles. The Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) authorized the President to impose sanctions on any company investing more than \$40m in either country on the grounds that both were sponsors of 'international terrorism'. At the G7 summit meeting in June 1996, French President Chirac warned his American counterpart that the Cuba sanctions and this new measure could produce 'a cycle of action and reaction' that would damage Alliance unity.⁵⁴ Clinton paid no heed to such advice. On August 5 he signed the Iran-Libya bill into law.

Not surprisingly, Paris was among the first and most vociferous critics of the ILSA. Foreign policy officials initiated high-level diplomatic talks with other EU states to consider possible retaliatory action while publicly and loudly attacking the Act: 'We do not accept the principle of extra-territorial application of national laws'.⁵⁵ President Chirac himself was blunt in his rejection of US trade sanctions whether aimed at countries in the Caribbean, North Africa or the Middle East. 'The unilateral US initiatives', he told a Naples news conference following a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi in early October, 'are unacceptable'.⁵⁶

The Clinton White House haughtily and arrogantly dismissed French and other European attacks, reminding its allies that Washington was the dominant hegemon in the 'New World Order'. Said one senior US official: 'it [extra-territorial sanctions] breaks the rules, but it works . . . In the end, they'll get over it. We're America, and they'll get over it'.⁵⁷

The ILSA targets were both major areas of French trade and investment, totalling hundreds of millions of dollars' economic activity.⁵⁸ In late 1997, however, a decision by the French oil multinational Total to sign a \$2bn natural gas development contract triggered a potentially explosive conflict between Washington and Paris. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright denounced the contract as 'beyond her understanding' and accused France of refusing to support American efforts to isolate Iran.⁵⁹ White House threats to impose sanctions under the ILSA unless Total rescinded the agreement provoked widespread scorn in Europe. Newly elected French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin denounced US attempts to 'impose laws on the rest of the world' while EU officials warned that any retaliation against Total would be 'illegal and unacceptable' and would lead to the automatic renewal of Europe's complaint to the WTO over whether Helms-Burton contravened the free trade organization's rules.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Quoted in *CubaInfo*, 11 July, 1996, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Quoted in John Palmer and Mark Tran, 'Europe Heads for Trade War with US', *Guardian Weekly*, 4 August, 1996, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Quoted in 'Chirac Attacks US Over Trade Sanctions', 4 October, 1996, *Reuters News Service*.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Steven Erlanger and David E. Sanger, 'On Global Stage, Clinton's Pragmatic Turn', *New York Times* 29 July, 1996, p. 17.

⁵⁸ See Gail Russell Chaddock, 'A New Era? Europe Tries to Buck US out of its Saddle', *Christian Science Monitor* (International Weekly Edition), 7-13 June, 1996, p. 7; Alan Cowell, 'Political Savvy Tempers European Furor over US Bill Aimed at Libya and Iran', *New York Times*, 7 August, 1996, p. 6.

⁵⁹ Quoted in 'Franco-American Ties Tense Once More', 4 October, 1997, *Reuters News Service*.

⁶⁰ Jospin and EU officials quoted in 'Jospin Defends Total, Rebuffs US Sanctions', 29 September, 1997, *Reuters News Service*; Roger Cohen, 'France Scoffs At US Protest Over Iran Deal', *New York Times*, 30 September, 1997, p. 12.

To defuse the possibility of a new transatlantic clash over unilateral US trade sanctions, the State Department indicated that it might be willing to exempt foreign firms, including Total, from compliance with the law if their governments worked to ‘ratchet up the pressure’ on Tehran and Tripoli to end sponsorship of global terrorism.⁶¹ For its part, the EU was also clearly reluctant to get involved in a new trade war with its superpower ally. In May 1998, the Clinton administration relented and waived sanctions against the French oil multinational. It was a small, but significant, victory and testimony to the fact that US diktats on the conditions of international trade and capital flows are likely to be resisted in the new world of global economic competition.

The Boutros Ghali Affair

In the era of the ‘New World Order,’ from the Gulf War to Somalia, the United Nations (UN) has lost most of its ‘multilateral’ character and has increasingly become a Third World army directed by First World interests. Boutros Boutros-Ghali played a central role in this shift, repaying the strong US-European support for his candidacy for the Secretary Generalship by ensuring UN backing for those large-scale initiatives favoured by the dominant capitalist countries. A pivotal symbolic figure in the transition from a bipolar to a unipolar world, he quickly fell out of favour with the Clinton White House once the conflict with the Soviet Union and Third World nationalism had been resolved to Washington’s satisfaction. His strong links to Europe and involvement in brokering deals benefiting European interests in Africa and Central Europe signalled to US policymakers that they no longer had an exclusive franchise on his services. Unwilling to tolerate for long a UN leader lacking sufficient ‘appreciation’ of US policy objectives, the Americans decided to oppose his re-election to a second term.⁶²

The confrontation between Paris and Washington over the fate of Boutros-Ghali only inflamed an already fractious bilateral relationship. Determined to block Boutros-Ghali’s bid for a second term, and promote the candidacy of Kofi Annan, a career UN official from Ghana, the Clinton administration waged a powerful diplomatic lobbying campaign led by the then US Ambassador Madeleine Albright. If Washington was Annan’s major supporter, Paris was his most reluctant backer. Angered by the US veto of a second term for Boutros-Ghali, the Chirac government demanded that he be replaced by a French speaker, not the English-speaking Annan. This demand was only dropped ‘after behind-the-scenes arm twisting from some of the UN’s most powerful members’.⁶³

The two Security Council protagonists focused their energies on mobilizing African support for their respective positions. Washington had already begun to

⁶¹ Quoted in Carol Giacomo, ‘US, EU Discuss Total Deal With Iran’, 2 October, 1997, *Reuters News Service*.

⁶² On Washington’s growing disillusionment with Boutros-Ghali, see Stanley Meisler, ‘Dateline UN: A New Hammarskjöld’, *Foreign Policy*, 98 (Spring 1995), pp. 180–97.

⁶³ ‘Ghanaian Gets Nod as French Drop Objections’, *The Guardian*, 14 December, 1996, p. 15. Also see Thomas W. Lippman and John M. Goshko, ‘Albright Led Challenge to US Chief’, *Washington Post*, 7 January, 1997, p. A1.

exert pressure back in October 1996, when Secretary of State Warren Christopher told African leaders that if they refused to reconsider their support for Boutros-Ghali, they risked the possibility that his replacement would not be from an African country. France's strategy centred on its ties to Cameroon which held the presidency of the Organization of African Unity. Unbeknown to Paris, American diplomats had also been courting this long-standing French ally, continually stressing the likelihood that a deadlock over Annan's approval would open the job to non-African candidates.⁶⁴ Ultimately such pressure proved decisive. Following the lone US veto in a Security Council vote on a second term for Boutros-Ghali in mid-November, the African countries capitulated, 'fearful a prolonged stalemate would spoil Africa's chances to hold the job . . .'.⁶⁵ France reluctantly agreed to Annan's election, its position no longer tenable as a result of this US-induced crack in the solid African bloc support for Boutros-Ghali.

Washington was prepared to risk dividing the Alliance by imposing its choice for UN Secretary General on an initially reluctant membership because it had a larger goal in mind: to reshape the global body's approach to peacekeeping, military intervention and economic development strategies in order to facilitate US efforts to compete with France and other European powers, politically and economically, in the latters' traditional spheres of influence.

Conclusion

In March 1997, French President Jacques Chirac intruded into Washington's historic 'sphere of influence'—Latin America—accompanied by 100 French businessmen and bankers hoping to share in the lucrative 'privatization' of public enterprises which up until then had been monopolized by US multinationals. During an eight day trip to the region, he proposed a summit conference of all Latin American and European heads of state in late 1998 to create 'a new and ambitious alliance' between the two continents. Just prior to the visit, Chirac publicly attacked US hegemonic ambitions. 'The United States', he declared, 'has the pretension to want to direct everything, it wants to rule the whole world'.⁶⁶ The specific trigger for this outburst was the way in which the US government had wielded its influence on behalf of American investors to out-muscle French corporations from a multi-billion dollar radar contract in the Brazilian Amazon.

Chirac's visit to the region was part of a greater French effort to counteract US hegemonic aspirations and challenge Washington's attempt to impose a unipolar 'New World Order'. Just as the US has attempted to encroach on traditional French spheres of influence and 'steal' clients by promoting 'self determination' and 'democratization', so France seeks to cultivate new relations within America's historic sphere, as well as with former US client states through its opposition to global economic sanctions.

⁶⁴ See *Ibid.*, pp. A1, A7.

⁶⁵ John M. Goshko, 'Ghanaian Is Selected U.N. Chief', *Washington Post*, 14 December, 1996, p. A22.

⁶⁶ Quoted in *El Pais* (Spain), 13 March, 1997, p. 13. Also see Francois Raitberger, 'France's Chirac Takes Jabs at US in Latin America', 18 March, 1997, *Reuters News Service*.

The rivalry so far, though, has brought few victories for the Élysée Palace which has been forced to make accommodations or concessions to the dominant hegemon over issues ranging from NATO to the Middle East. Moreover, there has been not only a convergence of views on some issues (support for the Algerian government) but also a greater reluctance on France’s part to raise new areas of disagreement with the United States. Nonetheless, even if the rivalry has abated for the time being, given Washington’s continued striving for global leadership and its willingness to resort to unilateral measures to achieve this objective, future conflicts cannot be discounted. In August 1997, Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine acknowledged that France was a middle level global power prepared to accept American’s superpower status ‘without acrimony’ but determined to challenge any US policies that threatened legitimate national interests.⁶⁷ France’s resolute opposition to US extra-territorial legislation has been one such case. Its refusal to accept America’s definition of what constitutes the rules of the global economic game will no doubt be another.

The end of the Cold War and the triumph of Western capitalism, in other words, has not led to an ‘end to history’. Nor has George Bush’s vision of a ‘New World Order’ under American leadership, proclaimed at the time of the Gulf War, become a reality. Senior alliance partners have refused to subordinate their global interests or goals to those of the dominant hegemon—even though they continue to depend upon it for protection. Over time, it has become abundantly clear that intercapitalist rivalries are not time or space bound, but are open-ended and continuous. In the post-Cold War era, American power projections have ranged from legal redefinitions of national sovereignty (Helms-Burton) to diplomatic interventions aimed at influencing development agendas (Francophone Africa) and key posts in global organizations (United Nations), to military intervention in regional conflicts (Bosnia). Criticized by Charles Maynes for its tendency to do what it wants, when it wants to whom it wants, America is not unilateral because it is worse than anybody else; it acts thus because it has the power to do so.⁶⁸ Hence, irrespective of the Western consensus on ‘free markets’ and ‘democracy’, and the larger need to maintain international order, there are still serious rivalries and conflicts over by which variant of ‘free markets’ and ‘democracy’, capitalist power’s interests will be served. In practical terms, for example, will it be US or European multinationals which will have privileged access to cheap labour, mineral extraction rights and/or special access to the privatization of public enterprises? Which capitalist countries’ favoured client will be the beneficiary of the so-called ‘democratic transitions’? Whose international functionary will serve, with royal impartiality, the interest of which patron? These are not merely academic questions, but central issues in this brave new world of empire building—issues that academics in international relations can only continue to ignore at their peril.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Quoted in Helen Fontanaud, ‘France Accepts US Supremacy ‘Without Acrimony’, 28 August, 1997, *Reuters News Service*.

⁶⁸ See Charles Maynes, ‘US Unilateralism and its Dangers’, *Review of International Studies*, 25:3 (July 1999), pp. 515–18.

⁶⁹ For another view, see Christopher Layne, ‘Rethinking American Grand Strategy: Hegemony or Balance of Power in the Twenty First Century?’, *World Policy Journal*, 15:2 (Summer 1998), pp. 8–28. Layne argues that while US hegemony ‘may be sustainable for perhaps another decade’, it ‘cannot be maintained much beyond that period’ (p. 25).