

# Against the New Internationalism

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Bad consequences can discredit good intentions.

—Jürgen Habermas<sup>1</sup>

When I think of the challenges facing international society in the wake of the invasion of Iraq, two images come to mind. The first, a work of postcard art, depicts a screenprint of the Statue of Liberty, with a twist. In the place of her striking face and radiating crown appears a decidedly masculine image: that of a helmeted marine, grim and tight-jawed, a cigarette poking insolently from his lips. The caption reads, in bold white capitals on black, "PEACE," and beneath it another phrase, asterisked: "conditions apply."<sup>2</sup> The second is a newspaper photograph of a young woman in New York taken during the global demonstrations against the war in February 2003. She has been called out of the march by the photographer and stands, at once defiant and bewildered, against a row of mounted police. Rugged up against the winter cold, she holds a placard upon which she has written a question: "Perpetual war for perpetual peace?"

Upon seeing these images I was immediately reminded of Suvendrini Perera's description of the war on terror as one "of category confusions and bizarre doublings":

a war where soldier, terrorist and refugee can be made indistinguishable, where victims fleeing Taliban oppression can be constructed as potential "sleepers" for its terror, where international conventions fail to protect asylum-seekers from being criminalised as "illegal"; a war where cluster bombs and food parcels share similar packaging; where loyal, long-

term residents are denuded overnight of rights by the quaintly named "USA-PATRIOT Act," and secret trials, forced interrogations and summary executions are re-imaged as no longer the instruments of tyranny but the prerogatives of Enduring Freedom.<sup>3</sup>

That was written in 2002, when the war on terror was only taking shape. Now bitter irony is the soup of the day, and Western leaders and opinion-makers ask us to find in it not nihilism but nourishment. Words and things no longer correspond. Liberty is a hermaphrodite, male *and* female, warrior *and* peacemaker, the only possible way of representing the army that frees, the democracy that slaughters, the liberator that tortures. Postcards ring truer than the speeches of politicians; and, as if to affirm the young placard waver, George W. Bush tells us that "the advance of freedom leads to peace."<sup>4</sup> Peace and war are no longer antonyms, utterly irreconcilable, but new lovers naively imagining a brighter future. What then can

<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Interpreting the Fall of a Monument," *Constellations* 10, no. 3 (2003), p. 364.

<sup>2</sup> "Liberty design" by Phil Hannaford, Arts Bandit, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Suvendrini Perera, "What Is a Camp?" *Borderlands* 1, no. 1 (May 2002); available at [www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au](http://www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au).

<sup>4</sup> George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy," speech given at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C., November 6, 2003; available at [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-3.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-3.html).

we salvage of liberal internationalism? Jürgen Habermas calls the war “an unimaginable break” with existing norms, and in its wake we may well wonder if they are not beyond repair.<sup>5</sup> The danger lies deeper even than Perera suggests, in the gap between the cosmopolitan norms of civil rights and international law, and the exceptionalist prerogatives of national sovereignty. It lies in the potential transformation of cosmopolitanism itself, in the construction of new “internationalist” norms built not on the developing dialogue, normative consensus, and collective decision-making of the international community, but on the physical power, and ethical vision, of the United States and its allies.

This project, promoted in writings by British prime minister Tony Blair and such influential intellectuals as William Shawcross, Michael Ignatieff, Lee Feinstein, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Jean Bethke Elshtain, constitutes a sweeping effort to combine preventive war and unilateral humanitarian enforcement into a new normative framework for international intervention. While some of these writers have argued for the United Nations’ structures and principles to undergo radical change, and others for it to be sidelined, all have framed their arguments in terms of a potent universalist claim about international justice and right.<sup>6</sup> While they do not reject the United Nations or the UN Charter outright as normative and legal frameworks for decisions about war and peace, these “new internationalists” do seek to displace its centrality and erect a new consensus in its place. If they succeed, the implications for international society and global security will be very disturbing indeed.

In the face of this new activist project of norm building, I wonder whether, and how, it might be possible to revive and rethink a

credible liberal ethic of international peace and security. In relation to contemporary concerns about terrorism, nation building, and WMD proliferation, this article thus sets out and critiques the claims of the new internationalism. As an alternative it draws upon Immanuel Kant’s normative commitment to perpetual peace—visible also in the UN Charter and the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)—but questions commitments in his thought that have enabled highly coercive and self-regarding forms of realpolitik and sovereignty to find their way into the very heart of internationalist power. In my view, the new internationalism of Shawcross, Ignatieff, Feinstein, Slaughter, Elshtain, and others only amplifies this problem, and if it gains undue influence the impact both on international security and on efforts to develop positive and credible ethical frameworks for the use of force will be grave. Against their conclusions that it is the norms and structures of the United Nations that need to be radically transformed, I argue that what must change is the violent and exclusivist idea of sovereignty that lingers, like a latent illness, in the very depths of modern cosmopolitanism.

<sup>5</sup> Habermas, “Interpreting the Fall,” p. 366.

<sup>6</sup> William Shawcross’s book is *Allies* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003). The others are discussed below. A 2004 article by Allen Buchanan and Robert Keohane promoting the creation of a “cosmopolitan institutional” framework for authorizing the preventive use of force also treads similar ground, but its scope is far more limited (to cases of the imminent first use of WMD), it affirms the United Nations as the prime context for deliberation, and it sets a much higher threshold of discussion and accountability than other proposals. For these reasons it cannot be strictly classified with the “new internationalism,” and will not be discussed here. Allen Buchanan and Robert. O. Keohane, “The Preventive Use of Force: A Cosmopolitan Institutional Proposal,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (2004), pp. 1–24.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF COSMOPOLITAN COMMUNITY?

British prime minister Tony Blair outlined the shape of the new paradigm in the closing stages of the Kosovo war, when he delivered a speech in Chicago with the portentous title “Doctrine of the International Community.” While it made sensible arguments about the need to recognize and respond to the implications of growing global interdependence for security, and set out arguments for humanitarian intervention, a more ambitious agenda was also visible:

We may be tempted to think back to the clarity and simplicity of the Cold War. But now we have to establish a new framework. No longer is our existence as states under threat. Now our actions are guided by a more subtle blend of mutual self-interest and moral purpose in defending the values we cherish. In the end values and interests merge. If we can establish and spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society then that is in our national interests too. The spread of our values makes us safer.<sup>7</sup>

While Blair sought to set conditions on humanitarian intervention, the speech is notoriously vague about how far the doctrine stretched—with heavy hints that it went beyond actions against massive and continuing violations of human rights to “dealing with dictators” and spreading the “values of liberty” and “open society.” These were not immediate or ad hoc goals, but to be the basis of an entirely “new framework” for promoting “the cause of internationalism.”<sup>8</sup> The seeds of his later support for the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime via a military invasion (his government already supported CIA covert action to remove Hussein) can already be seen here.<sup>9</sup> Likewise the speech’s premonition of the Bush administration’s 2003 “forward strategy of freedom” are striking.

Blair revived the “doctrine of the international community” in March 2004, this time in relation to Iraq. This time the revolutionary normative ambitions visible there were fully developed—a new vision of liberal universalism melded with the preemptive war doctrine of the U.S. neoconservatives. He justified invading Iraq even in the face of weak intelligence with an argument that “the risk of this new global terrorism and its interaction with states or organizations or individuals proliferating WMD is one I am simply not prepared to run . . . this is not the time to err on the side of caution; not a time to weigh the risks to an infinite balance; not a time for the cynicism of the worldly wise who favor playing it long.”<sup>10</sup> This urgent, fear-soaked rhetoric was matched with a sweeping argument that “nations that are free, democratic and benefiting from economic progress tend to be stable and solid partners in the advance of humankind”:

We cannot advance these values except within a framework that recognises their universality. If it is a global threat, it needs a global response, based on global rules. . . . Britain’s role is to find a way through this: to construct a consensus behind a broad agenda of justice and security and means of enforcing it.<sup>11</sup>

Far from being on the back foot over the failure to find WMD in Iraq or the controversy over the legality of Britain’s participa-

<sup>7</sup> Tony Blair, “Doctrine of the International Community,” speech given at the Economic Club, Chicago, April 24, 1999; available at [www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page1297.asp](http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page1297.asp).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein: An American Obsession* (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ten Downing Street Press Release, “Prime Minister Warns of Continuing Global Terror Threat,” March 5, 2004; available at [www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page5461.asp](http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/page5461.asp).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

tion in the war, Blair was already redirecting British foreign policy toward the task of revolutionizing global institutions and rules—in ways that would make regime change and preemption into the basis for a new normative framework:

It means reforming the United Nations so its Security Council represents 21st century reality; and giving the UN the capability to act effectively as well as debate. It means getting the UN to understand that faced with the threats we have, we should do all we can to spread the values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, religious tolerance and justice for the oppressed, however painful for some nations that may be.<sup>12</sup>

A slightly less ambitious, but no less disturbing, argument in this vein has been put by Lee Feinstein and Anne-Marie Slaughter in the January 2004 issue of *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>13</sup> There they assert a new principle: a “collective ‘duty to prevent’ nations run by rulers without internal checks on their power from acquiring or using WMD.” As with Blair’s arguments in 2003, they are seeking to embed a new internationalist norm with potentially revolutionary consequences, based on the “premise that the rules now governing the use of force, devised in 1945 and embedded in the UN Charter, are inadequate.”<sup>14</sup> It is not enough, they argue, that the UN already possesses the power to identify a state’s WMD programs as a “threat to international peace and security” and take measures, as it did with Iraq after 1990:

But articulating and acknowledging a specific duty to prevent such governments from *even acquiring* WMD will shift the burden of proof from suspicious nations to suspected nations and create the presumption of a need for early and, therefore, more effective action.<sup>15</sup>

They see such a “duty to prevent” as a smooth development of the emerging norm of humanitarian intervention, even (somewhat scandalously) mimicking the title of

the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty’s report *The Responsibility to Protect*, chaired by Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun.<sup>16</sup> Feinstein and Slaughter assert that the commission’s “efforts to redefine basic concepts of sovereignty and international community are highly relevant to international security,”<sup>17</sup> despite Evans’s and Sahnoun’s clear statement in 2002 that the report’s concerns and recommendations should *not* be related to the post–September 11 debates over security against terrorism and “hot pre-emption” of WMD threats—the issues were “conceptually and practically distinct.”<sup>18</sup> Like Bush and Blair, Feinstein and Slaughter are driven by a conviction that certain states cannot be trusted with weapons of mass destruction and that deterrence will not suffice to deal with the threat they might one day pose, and like Blair they argue that national interest and humanitarianism have converged in the post–September 11 environment: “The links between the two sets of issues, especially the need to tackle them with proactive strategies, are becoming more evident.” Such strategies range from “diplomatic pressure or incentives,” “economic measures,” to “coercive actions” along a scale from sanctions, inspections, and blockades, to the use of armed force in the last instance. The “utility of force in dealing with the most serious proliferation dangers,” they incredibly suggest, “is not a controversial proposition,”

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Lee Feinstein and Anne-Marie Slaughter, “A Duty to Prevent,” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 1 (2004), pp. 136–50.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138; emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: IDRC, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Feinstein and Slaughter, “A Duty to Prevent,” p. 141.

<sup>18</sup> Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun, “The Responsibility to Protect,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 6 (2002), p. 99.

and while they do not overtly endorse regime change actions such as in Iraq, their proposal leaves the door open to such actions since it seeks to control not only WMD proliferation “but also the people who possess them.” We can perhaps be grateful that they still affirm the centrality of the UN Security Council in the “duty to prevent” (and if it is paralyzed, a regional organization, such as NATO, “with sufficiently broad membership to permit serious deliberation over the exercise of a collective duty”). However, they still ultimately endorse unilateral action or “coalitions of the willing” after “these options are tried in good faith.”<sup>19</sup>

Michael Ignatieff makes a similar move, linking WMD proliferation to humanitarian intervention and folding it into a new universalist framework based on the power and moral authority of the United States. In doing so, he strongly endorses the principle of preventive war, and the U.S. invasion of Iraq, although not without some moral anguish and genuine anger at many U.S. actions.<sup>20</sup> In a long *New York Times* article in September 2003, he argues, “If the United States fails in Iraq, so will the United Nations.” In order to save the United Nations from what he sees as a deeply flawed (if principled) U.S. policy, based too much in unilateralism, corporate self-interest, and sanguine assumptions about the ease of transforming the country into a stable free-market democracy, he argues that the UN’s norms need to change: “It will have to rewrite its own rules for authorizing the use of force.” Here, like Blair, Feinstein, and Slaughter, he equates “defend[ing] human rights” with long-term threats from WMD, and adds to the now widely accepted grounds for intervention (such as ethnic cleansing and mass killing) cases “where democracy is overthrown and people inside

a state call for help,” where “states fail to stop terrorists on their soil from launching attacks,” and where “as in Iraq, North Korea and possibly Iran, a state violates the non-proliferation protocols regarding the acquisition of chemical, nuclear or biological weapons.” These, he says, “would be the cases when intervention by force could be authorized by majority vote on the Security Council.” To his credit, Ignatieff does argue that the membership of the Security Council should be expanded, that the veto power of the Permanent Five should be abolished, and that the U.S. should “commit to use force only with the approval of the Council.” This is undermined, however, by the vastly expanded freedom of (preventive) action he advocates for the UN.<sup>21</sup>

The dangers in the arguments of Feinstein, Slaughter, and Ignatieff are threefold: they are ultimately seeking to create a norm of prevention applied *selectively* to states deemed potential dangers; they endorse unilateral action, at least as a last resort; and, if such a norm were indeed to become accepted by NATO or the UN Security Council, as all hope, it is likely to undermine the Charter and the nonproliferation regime *even more* than unilateral actions such as the invasion of Iraq, which are at least hotly disputed. (This is without considering how it could undermine the growing but fragile acceptance of the “modified sovereignty” norm and intervention in cases of grave

<sup>19</sup> Feinstein and Slaughter, “A Duty to Prevent,” pp. 137, 149.

<sup>20</sup> See Michael Ignatieff, “I Am Iraq,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 23, 2003, pp. 13–14; for his criticism of the Bush administration, see Michael Ignatieff, “The Year of Living Dangerously,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 14, 2004, pp. 13–16.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Ignatieff, “Why Are We in Iraq? (And Liberia? And Afghanistan?),” *New York Times Magazine*, September 7, 2003, p. 85.

human rights violations if such interventions were to be perceived more and more as imperialistic.) That their proposals would undermine the NPT is made clear in Feinstein and Slaughter's argument that "regimes such as Iran's, because they sponsor terrorism, suppress democracy, and have clear nuclear designs, are not entitled to the same rights as other NPT members."<sup>22</sup> Even as they seek to build the "duty to prevent" on the basis of the NPT regime, their locus of concern is grossly selective, limited merely to American enemies such as Iraq, North Korea, and Iran rather than the designated nuclear weapons states or newer nuclear powers such as India, Pakistan, and Israel.

Perhaps seeing the NPT as an idealist platform unduly limited by the principle of noninterference, Feinstein and Slaughter fail to understand how it is a pragmatic document based on widely accepted understandings of the unstable character of deterrence and the genuine dynamics of proliferation (which is usually driven by a desire to attain strategic security rather than by genocidal intentions, Saddam Hussein's appalling departure notwithstanding). That their proposals could in fact make the situation worse is a prospect they refuse to see. They consider neither that unwisely chosen preventive action may actually encourage both horizontal *and* vertical proliferation, as is arguably true in the case of North Korea,<sup>23</sup> nor that in the absence of general WMD disarmament—as set out in Article VI of the NPT—preventive or preemptive action would merely be a dangerous and unpredictable form of triage for an epidemic obvious decades before. They are right to identify Saddam Hussein's *use* of chemical weapons as a legitimate precedent for selective disarmament, and to suggest his prosecution for crimes against humanity, but to

extrapolate from this case to "a duty to prevent" a selective list of rogue governments from acquiring WMD, while other states are left to do so unhindered, is deeply irresponsible. Such a norm, if accepted, could destroy the credibility of the entire nonproliferation regime, which rests on its consistency and near-universality. The refusal of nuclear weapons states to abide by their disarmament obligations nearly doomed the NPT at its twenty-five-year review conference in 1995, and it now limps from five-year review to five-year review, ever vulnerable to complete abandonment.<sup>24</sup>

The NPT regime could in fact be described as preventive, but on a universal rather than a selective basis. It was never meant as a shield for existing nuclear weapons states to retain or enhance their capabilities while denying them to strategic competitors (which is precisely the Bush administration's declared nuclear policy<sup>25</sup>). Feinstein and Slaughter are wrong to assume that some states can be trusted with WMD because "the behavior of open societies is subject to scrutiny," in contrast to governments who lack "internal checks" on their power: U.S. debates over nuclear strategy during the Cold War and the experience of the 1961 Cuban Missile Crisis suggest that strategic decision-making in democracies

<sup>22</sup> Feinstein and Slaughter, "A Duty to Prevent," p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> Roland Bleiker, "A Rogue is a Rogue is a Rogue: US Foreign Policy and the Korean Nuclear Crisis," *International Affairs* 79, no. 4 (July 2003), pp. 719–37.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Butler, *Fatal Choice: Nuclear Weapons and the Illusion of Missile Defense* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001), pp. 45–52.

<sup>25</sup> Bradford Plumer, "Busting Out," *Mother Jones*, May/June 2004; available at [www.motherjones.com/news/dailymojo/2004/06/06\\_521.html](http://www.motherjones.com/news/dailymojo/2004/06/06_521.html); and U.S. Government, "National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction," December 2002; available at [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/WMDStrategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/WMDStrategy.pdf).

can also be closed and secretive, and just as prone to producing genocidal decisions in a crisis.<sup>26</sup> This is why the NPT is nondiscriminatory in principle, and why it is a great deal more than a counter-proliferation mechanism. The *norm* embodied in the NPT is *disarmament*; counter-proliferation is merely a means to that end.

In a 2003 article, the political theorist and ethicist Jean Bethke Elshtain builds a similar argument for a new normative framework centered on the United States, but it is one far less dependent on the legal authority of the United Nations and less rhetorically embedded in “cosmopolitan” claims about human rights. Her argument replays at the domestic level Hedley Bull’s argument about order, guaranteed by great powers, being the condition for justice in international society<sup>27</sup>—the important detail being, of course, her view that this means that international society must be restructured so as to embed a norm of forcible intervention on behalf of the domestically ill-treated. What lies before the international community, she writes, is the problem of “how to bring about the political stability—the minimal civic peace—necessary to attain and secure fundamental human goods, including, of course, a measure of distributive justice”:

What follows is an argument for international justice construed as an equal claim to the use of coercive force, deployed on your behalf, if you are a victim of one of the many horrors attendant upon radical political instability . . . the burden of this responsibility will be borne disproportionately by the United States, given its unique capability to project power. I realize that some will argue that the kinds of interventions I call for in this essay amount to imperialism. I believe, however, that we simply must get past the almost inevitable negative reaction to views that call on the United States to exercise robust powers of intervention.<sup>28</sup>

In many ways the arguments of her article are important and welcome, especially regarding the moral failure of the international community in relation to such cases as Rwanda and Bosnia, and its reluctance to risk the lives of its own troops in the cause of humanitarian intervention, or in her effort to imagine a model of international citizenship that builds upon (but overcomes) selfish patriotism and “obliges those who are members of a particular community in relation to others outside their community.”<sup>29</sup> Likewise, her critique of NATO members’ self-regarding reluctance to deploy ground forces in Kosovo is incisive, and her overall support for more robust and effective interventions to prevent crimes against humanity is laudable. Her critique of the UN’s slowness to decide and deploy, and its weak response in cases such as Bosnia, however, are more relevant to Chapter VI operations, which are constrained by limited “peacekeeping” mandates. The 1999 East Timor intervention showed that when a more forceful Chapter VII mandate supports a military coalition with the ability and willingness to move fast, many lives can be saved. (Significantly, the United States refused an Australian request for “boots on the ground” in that case, suggesting that domestic constraints may prevent the realization of her proposal for a new U.S.-led *pax humanitas* and buttressing arguments for the creation of a UN rapid deployment force.)

<sup>26</sup> See Robert S. McNamara’s remarks on the Cuban Missile Crisis in his book with James G. Blight, *Wilson’s Ghost* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2003), pp. 188–91.

<sup>27</sup> For a summary of this view, see Christian Reus-Smit, *American Power and World Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), pp. 108–109.

<sup>28</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, “International Justice as Equal Regard and the Use of Force,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 17, no. 2 (2003), pp. 63–64.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Nonetheless, Elshtain makes salient points about the existing model of intervention, which has involved a neglect of reconstruction: humanitarian intervention, she argues, embodies a "victim/victimizer" model in which force "is a kind of rescue, even welfare, as opposed to the use of force as a way to strengthen or to secure a polity within which accountable officials are responsible for securing civic security, order, and minimal decency."<sup>30</sup> Her argument can be read as a welcome call for better efforts to commit to and rebuild shattered societies like East Timor, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, but in this form it can also be put to use as a rationale for a much more ambitious program of intervention and order building that includes regime change. Elshtain does not seek here to use her "equal regard" ethic either to support the removal of dictatorships or to address WMD proliferation, unlike the other "new internationalists." She does, however, cite Hussein's Iraq as "a violator of minimal civic peace," and she did support the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq in the *Boston Globe*.<sup>31</sup>

There are two further problems with her argument. The first is the overreliance on just war theory as a guide both to *jus ad bellum* conditions for decisions about force and *jus in bello* protection of civilians. Elshtain rightly makes the caveat that interventions should avoid, "to the extent that this is humanly possible, either deepening the injustice already present or creating new instances of injustice," but in my view just war principles of proportionality and unintentional harm fail to address adequately such dangers.<sup>32</sup> The second problem flows from what is a major flaw in just war theory: the refusal to place the UN Charter and Security Council at the center of normative decisions about the use of force, or international criminal tribunals at the center of

prosecutions for violations of the laws of war.<sup>33</sup> While the problems with the UN Security Council are certainly well known, Elshtain devotes a single paragraph to dismissing it in favor of an argument that there is "a presumptive case in favor of the use of armed force by a powerful state or alliance of states who have the means to intervene, to interdict, and to punish in behalf of those who are under assault."<sup>34</sup>

Who is to be this state, and who its allies? Here Elshtain conducts an ethical sleight of hand: while she bases her normative claim for equal regard not merely in just war doctrine and Christianity but in "principles that are part of the universal armamentarium of states . . . if they are members of the United Nations and signatories of various international conventions," she immediately brushes that body and its capacity for global debate and transparency aside. Instead she offers the "Spider-Man" ethic: "The more powerful have greater responsibilities." The superpower, the United States, is recast as *superhero*, with all the absence of moral ambiguity such a metaphor implies:

The United States is itself premised on a set of universal propositions concerning human dignity and equality. There is no conflict in principle between our national identity and universal claims and commitments. The conflict lies elsewhere—between what we affirm and aspire to, what we can effectively do, and what we can responsibly do.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> See Jean Bethke Elshtain, "A Just War?" *Boston Globe*, October 6, 2002, p. H4.

<sup>32</sup> Elshtain, "International Justice," p. 68; Anthony Burke, "Just War or Ethical Peace? Moral Discourses of Strategic Violence after 9/11," *International Affairs* 80, no. 2 (2004), pp. 329–53.

<sup>33</sup> Buchanan and Keohane, in "The Preventive Use of Force," p. 4, make this latter criticism of just war theory.

<sup>34</sup> Elshtain, "International Justice," p. 67.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 73, 74.



While she is right to suggest that U.S. power is likely to be called upon in many emergency situations, the real import of her argument is that the UN as a decision-making body no longer has legitimacy, and that preponderant power can be matched with unilateral prerogative. Instead we can rely on "coalitions of the willing" or "other avenues for multilateral action, perhaps a series of regional security alliances."<sup>36</sup> Such alliances, however, are always structured by self-interest and skewed especially toward their most powerful members (something for which she rightly excoriates the UN Security Council), and cannot match the possibility for greater dialogue, equality, and transparency present, admittedly imperfectly, in the United Nations. The war against Iraq is instructive here. The dominant coalition members, the United States and Britain, spent enormous energy putting a fraudulent case for war to the global community and their own publics, while the British, Spanish, and Australian governments were opposed by significant proportions of their own parties, parliaments, and national communities. The poverty of dialogue and accountability offered by coalitions is palpable here, and Elshstain's ethic, based as it is on narrow dialogue between government elites, fails to grapple with the profound problem of accountability to citizens inherent in all security policy-making.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq also suggests a further problem for her proposal for a global *pax humanitas* underpinned by the idealism and power of the United States. The war has not only sullied the moral reputation of the United States, but deeply constrained its ability to respond to what is arguably the worst international crisis since Bosnia and Rwanda: Darfur. The international community has been agonizingly slow to respond to this two-year-old crisis,

with the Security Council only passing a resolution creating a UN mission in Sudan on March 24, 2005, while a substantial in-country military presence to assist the African Union mission will take many more months to establish.<sup>37</sup> The United States cannot find enough troops for Iraq, let alone a new intervention in the Sudan, where Africans will bear the major burden. Trapped in a web of its own making in Iraq, Spider-Man has ironically been reduced to playing a supporting role in the UN Security Council and in NATO.<sup>38</sup>

While Elshstain's argument cannot be reduced to the U.S. neoconservative position, it comes close to the arguments of those, like Francis Fukuyama, who criticize realism, applaud the "traditional moralism of U.S. foreign policy," and promote a new internationalism but refuse to accept that it should be based upon the UN Charter. Claiming Kant's case for "an international league of liberal democracies governed by the rule of law" as inspiration for his argument for a new league that "looks much more like NATO than the United Nations," Fukuyama argues that "such a league should be much more capable of forceful action to protect its collective security from threats

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See the reports from the International Crisis Group, "Darfur: The Failure to Protect," *Africa Report* 89, March 8, 2005; and "A New Sudan Action Plan," *Africa Briefing* 24, April 26, 2005; available at [www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1230&l=1](http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1230&l=1).

<sup>38</sup> A May 24, 2005, press release states that the NATO Council has agreed on "initial military options for possible NATO support to the African Union" in Darfur, such as "strategic airlift; training, for example in command and control and operational planning; and improvement of ability of the AU's mission in Darfur to use intelligence." NATO Press Office, "Statement by the Spokesman on NATO Support to the African Union for Darfur"; available at [www.nato.int/docu/pr/2005/p05-065e.htm](http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2005/p05-065e.htm).

arising from the non-democratic part of the world.”<sup>39</sup> It is difficult, in principle, to distinguish Elshstain’s view that it is in the long-term interest of the United States to foster and to sustain an international society of equal regard from Fukuyama’s neo-conservative view that “the United States and other democracies have a long-term interest in preserving the sphere of democracy in the world, and in expanding it where possible and prudent.”<sup>40</sup> For Fukuyama, this is the hard strategic edge of the end of history, where societies are violently transformed from being “still stuck in history” to participants in its culmination—an end to which Elshstain’s optimistic belief in the “universal claims and commitments” of the United States can too easily be turned.<sup>41</sup> In the wake of the invasion of Iraq, with its ongoing chaos, twenty-one thousand civilian dead, and the scandal of Abu Ghraib, it is hard to share her faith.<sup>42</sup> Is the United States truly to be the vehicle for the new internationalism, and is this an acceptable price?

#### THE FATE OF PERPETUAL PEACE

Elshstain evokes a Hollywood comic-book hero, Spider-Man, as an image of the new conjunction of power and right underpinning the new internationalism, but a more apt analogy might be *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. This cannot be a legitimate internationalism, even less a cosmopolitanism, but it speaks with its voice, wears its clothes, and has declared its intention to renovate its house. This creates serious problems for those, like myself, who wish to defend and improve a liberal ethic of war and peace. (Such an ethic would, in my view, be focused upon the limitation of the resort to and destructiveness of strategic violence and the enforcement of international human rights law, within a frame-

work of open and transparent processes of international law- and decision-making centered when at all possible upon the United Nations. Notwithstanding the need to use or deploy force for purposes of deterrence, defense, and humanitarian intervention, such an ethic would also be directed toward long-term disarmament.) Not only is there the danger that such views, already given enormous public airing in the Western world, could force real change and impose themselves as the basis for a new normative framework, but we should also ask ourselves what they might reveal about liberal internationalism. Why can they seemingly inhabit it so comfortably? What then might be an authentic, or at least ethically and politically defensible, liberal ethic of war and peace?

The first question we face regards the role of force in such an ethic. The new internationalists all share a relatively sanguine view of the role and legitimacy of force in international life. So long as it is deployed for apparently idealist or cosmopolitan ends, as decisions to use it are reached through a specified procedure, and as its use is limited by ethical constraints, the use of force is both normatively right and practically effective. Clausewitz with a liberal face: war is the continuation of morality by other means. Have they forgotten that the vision of the great cosmopolitan philosopher Immanuel Kant was *perpetual peace*? Peace was not to be a wishful supplement to the enactment of a cosmopolitan international polity, but

<sup>39</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 276–84.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276; Elshstain, “International Justice,” p. 74.

<sup>42</sup> Casualty figures are minimal estimates based on an ongoing cross-reference of media reporting sourced from Iraq Body Count: [www.iraqbodycount.net](http://www.iraqbodycount.net).

utterly central to it. Kant promoted the gradual abolition of standing armies and, with the establishment of a “federation of peoples” based on republican constitutions and principles of universal hospitality, the definitive abolition of the need to resort to war. Kant saw this as a “pacific federation,” in contrast to the new internationalists, who wish to ground in norms what can only be termed a “martial federation.” The first article of “Perpetual Peace,” in fact, was to prevent hostilities being concluded

with a secret reservation of material for a future war . . . if this were the case, it would be a mere truce, a suspension of hostilities, not a peace . . . peace means an end to all hostilities, and to attach the adjective “perpetual” to it is already suspiciously close to pleonasm. A conclusion of peace nullifies all existing reasons for a future war.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, Kant argues that perpetual peace is essential to the preservation of human rights, because not only is war “bad because it produces more evil people than it destroys,” the “hiring of men to kill or be killed seems to mean using them as mere machines and instruments in the hands of someone else (the state), which cannot be easily reconciled with the rights of man in one’s own person.”<sup>44</sup> While the modern phenomena of ethnic cleansing and genocide have certainly problematized an exclusively pacifistic extrapolation from these arguments, lending credence to those who argue for “cosmopolitan” deployments of force to protect human rights and enforce international human rights law, his argument here still retains enormous normative and analytical power. It can sensibly be extended into an argument that in modern strategy not only are one’s own soldiers made into “mere machines and instruments” of power, but so are the lives of the enemy and its citizens. In the light of the rare

to nonexistent enforcement of the international law of war, modern *jus in bello* restraints have done little to stand in the way of this machinic, instrumentalizing process, with often disastrous results.

The norm of peace and the condemnation of war are not only present in philosophy, but in international law and many key documents of twentieth-century global politics. The Preamble to the UN Charter states that the union was formed “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind,” and that its members undertake “to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest.” While this certainly builds in an operative tension between collective security and disarmament, the norm of peace is unequivocally declared. Article VI of the NPT goes further, saying:

Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.<sup>45</sup>

It does not matter whether this clause seems unrealistic or unwise, particularly in the short to medium term. It establishes a *norm* endorsed by the 182 countries that have signed and ratified the treaty.<sup>46</sup> This norm is the basic condition of the treaty’s viability,

<sup>43</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” in Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 93–108.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112, 95.

<sup>45</sup> Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; available at [disarmament.un.org:8080/wmd/npt](http://disarmament.un.org:8080/wmd/npt).

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Schell, *The Unfinished Twentieth Century: The Crisis of Weapons of Mass Destruction* (New York: Verso, 2003), p. 58.

without which any practical claim to prevent nuclear proliferation ceases to exist. It establishes, in international law, Kant's injunction to eliminate standing armies. It is an injunction driven by the weight of awful history, not merely of the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the near-Holocaust of the Cuban Missile Crisis, but of what Étienne Balibar calls "the long twentieth-century 'European civil war'" that decisively discredits any Clausewitzian equivalence of violent means and political ends: "No 'absolute' victory is possible, no final suppression or neutralization of the enemy. Whenever you believe to be able to reach this 'final' solution, you create the conditions for more destruction and self-destruction. Mutual extermination as such does not have an 'end' . . . it can reach an end only when it is radically deprived of its legitimacy, and if collective institutionalized counterpowers emerge."<sup>47</sup>

Needless to say, the new internationalism has little time for this norm and the disarmament project it imposes. The selective enforcement of nonproliferation norms advocated by most is matched by an ontological challenge to peace as a concept, especially in the work of just war theorists such as Elshtain. Her book *Women and War* argues that "peace is an ontologically suspicious concept, as troubling in its own way as war," and it contains a brief, but sweeping, rejection of Kant's "Perpetual Peace," saying that it is "a ghost that should be put to rest":

His peace is a solipsistic dream which can exist among "like kinds and equals only," making of the mere existence of "otherness" a flaw in the perfect scheme of things. Kantian peace promises not only what can never be but what would be undesirable in any case, a logic that cannot get beyond the logic of war, conjuring up images of "two irre-

ducible opposites confronting one another," with war the enemy to peace. And politics, which is the way human beings have devised for dealing with their differences, gets eliminated.<sup>48</sup>

Is politics truly eliminated? Such a statement is only meaningful if politics is reduced to war—in Clausewitzian terms, if war is politics by other means. Here it is not peace that cannot escape the logic of war; it is politics. It would seem obvious, however—if we refuse to naturalize violence and quarantine it from intensive critical inquiry—that peace requires not an end to politics but *more politics*: more creative and sensitive efforts to resolve conflict, promote dialogue, and preserve differences rather than either magnify or efface them through violence.

Furthermore, Elshtain's gesture at deconstruction ("war's historic opponents . . . are *inside* a frame with war") dissolves into normative incoherence. Peace is not the Janus face of war, but its normative *other*. Certainly peace and war are linked as systems of meaning—the horrors of war provide peace with its normative force—but *as* norms there is a vast distance between them. They are like planets separated by the vacuum of space, their overlapping gravitational forces drawing every action, every policy, and every ethic in one direction or another. There is no ontological middle ground, no viable normative place of war/peace where the two can mesh together in a mutually enhancing exchange. I argue this because it is just such an imagined

<sup>47</sup> Étienne Balibar, *We, The People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 222.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 255.

normative harmony of war and peace that underpins the new internationalism and hides there as a new ontological claim.

The practical force to my argument is supplied by the fact that just as every normative argument made in this field will reinforce either war or peace, policy actions will also do so, ineluctably affecting the future possibilities for global security and conflict. Such a practical understanding is implicit in the international system of arms control set out by the NPT, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the now moribund Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which is structured by the need to manage and gradually eliminate the security dilemma. In this sense, the new internationalists who argue for selective/preventive counter-proliferation, while remaining silent about the U.S. administration's plans for missile defense and space, are literally playing with nuclear fire. As Neta Crawford argues, a preventive security doctrine "is likely to create more of both fearful and aggressive states . . . instability is likely to grow as a preventive war doctrine creates the mutual fear of surprise attack."<sup>49</sup> Likewise Article VI of the NPT, with its injunction for general as well as nuclear disarmament, embodies an insight that WMD proliferation is also driven by a desire to counter conventional military threats cheaply. This is the widely understood basis for Israeli nuclear doctrine, and it seems reasonable to see it as at least part of the rationale for the Iranian and North Korean programs.<sup>50</sup> A desire for *asymmetric* as much as mutual deterrence drives WMD proliferation, and hence the proliferation of conventional and mass destruction weapons cannot be disentangled.

While perpetual peace does not imply an absolutist pacifism, or deny peoples a limited right to self-defense, it withholds

normative approval from war and demands a longer-term effort to eliminate it from human society. With the aim of distinguishing such an approach from just war doctrine—which is based on a norm of limited war—I have advocated such a long-term effort under the label "ethical peace." Drawing inspiration from Kant's vision, ethical peace combines confidence building, conflict resolution, and sustained disarmament efforts with a far more stringent and accountable normative regime for the use of force nested *within* existing international law and norms. As an ethical system it is not based in a rigid procedural system of moral reasoning—a "tick the box" ethic that has already taken too many lives—but in a relentlessly self-critical ethic that is concerned as much with the outcomes of decisions as with adherence to rules. In this sense ethical peace is only partially deontological: it is anchored in a universal normative claim (peace) but eschews the modernist confidence in procedure typical of much moral theory.<sup>51</sup> Ethical peace does not require the obsessive search for a metaphysical absolute divorced from difficult realities, as Elshtain believes. It does, however, demand a single-minded, long-term effort to dismantle security dilemmas, brick by terrible brick. Conflict will still be a part of human society, and politics will be necessary, but it must be made less lethal.

<sup>49</sup> Neta C. Crawford, "The Slippery Slope to Preventive War," *Ethics & International Affairs* 17, no. 1 (2003), pp. 30–39.

<sup>50</sup> See Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); and Roland Bleiker, *Divided Korea: Toward a Culture of Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Burke, "Just War or Ethical Peace?" pp. 349–53.

## THE MORAL CRISIS OF LIBERAL INTERNATIONALISM

I find the arguments of the new internationalists so disturbing—especially their rejection of the United Nations in favor of unilateral or alliance-based action—because they compound an already profound crisis in the practical evolution of liberal internationalism. My concern is that liberal internationalism has been inexorably drawn toward the norm of war and the instrumental images of the human Kant believed war would engender.

The moral crisis of liberal internationalism is starkly set out in the “containment” of Iraq during the 1990s under the banner of a number of UN Security Council resolutions calling for the disarmament by Iraq of its WMD capabilities and the dismantling of its programs. This was a novel experiment in international law enforcement that, far from setting an admirable precedent as it should have, represents a profound moral and political failure. While I believe that the Iraqi regime’s use of chemical weapons during the 1980s constituted a legitimate precedent for this both *selective* and *coercive* program, this was not the sole or primary reason for it.<sup>52</sup> In the United States especially, arguments about the security of the United States and its allies in the Middle East were uppermost. As former U.S. Marine and UNSCOM inspector Scott Ritter argues, “In many ways the war-ending 1991 Security Council resolution 687 with its economic sanctions was supported as much for the pressure it would put on Saddam’s regime as for its disarmament benefits.”<sup>53</sup> Nor did the United States and Britain make any effort to set up an ad hoc tribunal to prosecute the regime for crimes against humanity, perhaps because it would expose the culpability of the Western allies (and other permanent members, such as

France) in supporting the regime through the 1990s with loan guarantees and exports that allowed it to develop WMD programs to the extent that it did.<sup>54</sup>

When it comes to the selective and coercive disarmament of a state under the banner of liberal internationalism, three important considerations must be foremost. The first is that the program supports the larger normative regime—nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation—from which it derives legitimacy. The second is the need for the program to be principled and morally beneficial, in an absolute sense: that it enhance both global security and the security of the citizens of the state being disarmed. The third is that it serve and enact universal, rather than statist or particularist, values and interests. In my view the containment and disarmament of Iraq fails all three tests. The approval by the U.S. president in 1991 of a covert CIA operation to remove Saddam Hussein from power, and the U.S. and British insistence that the sanctions should remain in place until he was gone (in direct violation of Resolution 687), perverted the process with a statist, geopolitical agenda.<sup>55</sup> And while the regime certainly sought to conceal its programs and thwart the work of the inspectors, the U.S.-U.K. regime change pol-

<sup>52</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 687 (1991) did refer to Iraq’s “prior use of chemical weapons,” but also mentioned the “use by Iraq of ballistic missiles in unprovoked attacks.” *The United Nations and the Iraq-Kuwait Conflict 1990–96* (New York: UN Department of Public Information, 1996), p. 194.

<sup>53</sup> Scott Ritter, *Endgame* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), p. 133.

<sup>54</sup> Alan Friedman, *Spider’s Web: Bush, Saddam, Thatcher and the Decade of Deceit* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> Cockburn and Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein*, p. 31; Stanley Meisler, “U.S. Sanctions Threat Takes UN by Surprise,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1991, p. 10; and Glen Rangwala, “The Myth That All Iraq Needs to Do to Lift Sanctions Is Comply with Weapons Inspectors”; available at [www.middleeastreference.org.uk/mythoflifting.html](http://www.middleeastreference.org.uk/mythoflifting.html).

icy did little to convince the Iraqi government that the UN was acting neutrally or that it should cooperate with the inspectors.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, it now appears Iraq was virtually disarmed by 1997.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, the sweeping and draconian sanctions, imposed by the Security Council on a country whose infrastructure had been badly damaged by war and administered in a particularly vindictive way (even if compounded by Saddam's refusal to accept the oil-for-food program until 1996), directly contributed to the deaths of anywhere from 200,000 to one million people.<sup>58</sup> Even the creation of the Kurdish safe haven and the Security Council's "revo[cation] of the Iraqi government's free use of its own airspace," which Jürgen Habermas saw as evidence of the evolution "of an international community that eliminates the state of nature between nations," was perverted to statist ends.<sup>59</sup> The safe havens were used as bases for CIA coup making, while the southern no-fly zones gave the United States an opportunity to bomb Iraq without reference to the Security Council.<sup>60</sup> Some U.S. policy-makers even saw the sanctions as serving their regime change agenda: a former CIA official associated with the Iraq operation has said that senior U.S. policy-makers "really believed that the sanctions policy might encourage a coup," and in 2002 Colin Powell was still saying that "the pressure of sanctions are part of a strategy of regime change, support for the opposition, and reviewing additional options that might be available of a unilateral or multilateral nature."<sup>61</sup> The perversion of the Iraqi disarmament efforts by illegal statist agendas, and the enormous crime against humanity that resulted from the sanctions, corrode any claims that the containment of Iraq could represent a legitimate normative expression of liberal internationalism. Yet still we have the appearance (in an otherwise thoughtful

article) of morally bizarre arguments, like those of Chris Brown, that the suffering caused by the sanctions could "provide the best available justification for moving away from containment and employing force to bring about a change in the Iraqi regime."<sup>62</sup>

The moral failure of the containment effort could have profoundly negative consequences for global and human security:

<sup>56</sup> Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Aziz directly raised concerns about the U.S.-U.K. covert operations with UNSCOM chairman Rolf Ekeus. Scott Ritter also quotes an Iraqi colonel who revealed to him that the regime had foiled a June 1996 coup plot, coordinated by the CIA, which had been timed to coincide with UNSCOM inspections, and mentions his own concerns about the role of CIA covert operations staff seconded to UNSCOM in 1992 and 1993. See Ritter, *Endgame*, pp. 140, 131-34, 143-44.

<sup>57</sup> See David Kay's testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services on January 28, 2004; available at [globalresearch.ca/articles/KAY401A.html](http://globalresearch.ca/articles/KAY401A.html).

<sup>58</sup> Cockburn and Cockburn cite an FAO study estimating that 576,000 children had died as a result of sanctions and a WHO study (using Iraqi Ministry of Health figures) estimating that 90,000 Iraqis were dying every year in public hospitals over and above normal death rates. Extrapolating from these figures, they argued in 2000 that the number of Iraqis of all ages who died as a result of the sanctions was "closer to one million." A March 1999 Richard Garfield study, commissioned by the Joan B. Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies in the light of concerns about the UN's methodology and sources, estimated 106,000-227,000 deaths of children under the age of five. However, these were not figures for all ages and did not continue until 2003, when the sanctions were lifted. Cockburn and Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein*, pp. xxix, 114-35; and Richard Garfield, *Morbidity and Mortality among Iraqi Children from 1990 through 1998: Assessing the Impact of the Gulf War and Economic Sanctions*, Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, March 1999.

<sup>59</sup> Habermas, quoted in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 39.

<sup>60</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Iraq: A Report from the Inside* (London: Granta, 2003), p. 147.

<sup>61</sup> Cockburn and Cockburn, *Saddam Hussein*, p. 44; and Rangwala, "The Myth That All Iraq Needs."

<sup>62</sup> Chris Brown, "Self-Defense in an Imperfect World," *Ethics & International Affairs* 17, no. 1 (2003), p. 7.

it may undermine the credibility of future counter-proliferation activity, complicate efforts to restore stability to Iraq and involve the United Nations, and corrode the entire normative validity of the United Nations and the liberal internationalism it claims to embody.

The problem for us is that while the containment of Iraq cannot be a legitimate *normative* expression of cosmopolitanism, it was a very powerful *political* one. Such an intrusion of highly coercive and self-regarding forms of national sovereignty into the architecture of internationalist power reveals a profound practical and conceptual aporia within liberal internationalism. Both the experience of Iraq and the arguments of the new internationalists show us that pressures for the qualification of sovereignty are coming from *within* the space of sovereignty. In such an internationalism the violent and exclusivist modern concept of sovereignty is *not* being transformed, as a genuine cosmopolitanism would expect, but strengthened and affirmed.

#### INTERNATIONALISM, UNDER AN EMPTY SKY

Two further elements are particularly striking, and disturbing, about the arguments of the new internationalists. The first is the material and moral centrality of the United States to the new normative order that they envision. Elshtain argues that the United States is a bearer of universal values and of the primary burden of enforcement, while Ignatieff argues for "putting the United States at the head of a revitalized United Nations": "New rules for intervention, proposed by the United States and abided by it, would end the canard that the United States, not its enemies, is the rogue state. A new charter on intervention would put America

back where it belongs, as the leader of the international community instead of the deeply resented behemoth lurking off-stage."<sup>63</sup> The second is their poorly concealed desire for decisive solutions to unwelcome and threatening political realities, and their view that force can easily provide them.

In his book *Virtual War*, Ignatieff makes the revealing statement that "virtual war" produces merely "virtual victory": "Since the means employed are limited, the ends achieved are equally constrained: not unconditional surrender, regime change or destruction of the war-making capacity of the other side, only an ambiguous 'end-state.'" Posing a question that now reads like a prophecy, he asks, "Why do virtual wars end so ambiguously?" and then answers: "Liberal democracies that are unwilling to repair collapsed states, to create democracy where none existed, and to remain on guard until the institutions are self-sustaining and self-reproducing, must inevitably discover that virtual victory is a poor substitute for the real thing."<sup>64</sup>

These then, are the passions that drove liberals to support the invasion of Iraq, and which drive them, in its wake, to refashion liberal internationalism in a new guise, as a convergence of universal and American values backed by "decisive force." Yet Ignatieff also cautioned that we may never "ask ourselves clearly enough whether our moral emotions are real . . . we need to reflect on the potential for self-righteous irrationality which lies hidden in abstractions like human rights."<sup>65</sup> The destructive trap hid-

<sup>63</sup> Elshtain, "International Justice," p. 74; and Ignatieff, "Why Are We in Iraq?" p. 85.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), pp. 208-10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14.



den in the appeal of international moralism was identified long before by Hans Morgenthau, who felt that the historic weakness of cosmopolitan morality leaves the statesman with a "perpetually uneasy conscience" that is soothed by pouring "the contents of his national morality into the now almost empty bottle of universal ethics." Nations "oppose each other now as the standard-bearers of ethical systems . . . the moral code of one nation flings the challenge of its universal claim with messianic fervor into the face of another, which reciprocates in kind. Compromise, the virtue of the old diplomacy, becomes the treason of the new."<sup>66</sup> This Morgenthau rightly saw as particularly dangerous, because it leaves little room for plural claims:

The world has room for only one, and the other must yield or be destroyed. Thus, carrying their idols before them, the nationalistic masses of our time meet in the international arena, each group convinced that it executes the mandate of history, that it does for humanity what it seems to do for itself, and that it fulfils a sacred mission ordained by Providence, however defined. Little do they know that they meet under an empty sky from which the Gods have departed.<sup>67</sup>

We do not have to subscribe to Morgenthau's realist pessimism to acknowledge the profundity of his appeal for caution, a caution that must temper any idealism we may still want to harbor in a chastened, post-modern search for perpetual peace. The United Nations has long been fissured by a tragic and intractable struggle between the prerogatives of sovereignty and the cosmopolitan vision of the "universal community"—but it should be resolved not by radically transforming its structures and principles, but by transforming *sovereignty* and its violent conceptual form in ways we have only begun to explore. A revived liberal internationalism must be tempered by the fear that our ideals may be suspect, our means dangerous, and our ends tarnished; and if it is to be a guide to action, it must resist the perennial seductions of an age that strives for a day when thinking can stop, and action can be pure.

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<sup>66</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), pp. 245–49.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

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