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From Containment to Pax Americana

The National Security Strategy of the United States

by Jürgen Wagner

It is no secret that a group of neoconservatives led by Vice-President Dick Cheney and assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz largely control US foreign policy. These hardliners from the spectrum of the extreme Republican rightwing successfully exploit the terrorist attacks of September 11 to promote their ideas on the role of US foreign policy solidified over years in the form of the quickly developed Bush doctrine and make them the official government policy with the National Security Strategy (NSS) published on September 20. [1]

The Central Idea of the Neoconservative Grand Strategy

Since Charles Krauthammer proclaimed the "unipolar moment" at the beginning of the 90s that followed the end of the Soviet Union and the rise of the US to the sole superpower, the demand for a perpetuation of US hegemony has been at the center of neoconservative thinking. This new edition of US foreign policy was laid down in its outlines ten years ago in the Defense Planning Guidance written by Cheney and Wolfowitz among others.

In September 2000, a study authored by Wolfowitz, Lewis Libby, Cheney's chief of staff and the brother of the US president Jeb Bush emphasized that all US foreign policy should be subject to this goal: "The US will not be exposed to any global rival." The Grand Strategy of the US aims at preserving and extending this advantageous position as far as possible in the future." [2]

Corresponding to the neoconservative preferences, the NSS sees the pre-eminent task of Washington's foreign policy in the preservation of US leadership: "The president doesn't intend allowing any other foreign

power to catch-up with the enormous lead opened up to the US since the Cold War." [3]

Blueprint of Permanent (Military) Dominance

Avoidance of a future conflict with a potential rival – Russia and China are named in particular – has decisive importance from a US view. "We are alert toward a new superpower competition", the NSS underlines. To prevent this competition, the military potential of the United States must be "great enough to deter adversaries hoping to surpass or equal the power of the US in military armament" (p.30). This call for permanent military dominance is a central cornerstone of US hegemonic policy. "America should attempt to preserve and extend its global leadership position through the superiority of its military", the neoconservatives proclaimed before their entrance in the White House. [4] This argument follows a twofold logic: Military supremacy is the necessary condition for a rigorous protection of US interests. Only this enables improving its power position, reconfiguring this position in military strength and maintaining its global leadership position. If this does not succeed, potential rivals will be encouraged to challenge the US that will inevitably lead to a disastrous belligerent conflict between the great powers. [5]

Operationalization of US Predominance

Already under Bill Clinton, preserving the US leadership position and many operative elements of the US hegemonic policy described in the NSS – unilateralism, mission consciousness, interventionism – was emphasized. These different elements are now successfully summarized in a doctrine. Therefore

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some consider the NSS “a brilliant synthesis” and see it as the successor of the containment policy that functioned for decades as Washington’s Grand Strategy. [6]

In fact, the NSS represents the most aggressive and most coherent concept for an imperial US policy since the Cold War. “In the worst case”, according to John Ikenberry, professor of geopolitics at Georgetown University, “a neo-imperial vision is central in which the United States claims a global role, sets standards, defines dangers, applies force and exercises jurisdiction.” [7]

Thus the NSS is the instruction manual for practical conversion of US hegemony and rigorous protection of US interests.

Proliferation – the New Danger

The focus of attention is now on the spread of weapons of mass destruction (proliferation) after the attacks of September 11 as the US government emphasizes. This “battle against proliferation” was proclaimed by Bush as a guiding principle on January 29, 2002 in his remarks to the nation and adopted in the NSS (p.6): “Our immediate attention is directed at the terrorist organizations of global range and state supporters of terrorism who as their forerunners may use weapons of mass destruction.”

The nearly exclusive concentration on military operations is new. Other possibilities – especially arms control – are declared secondary or second-rate. “The US [with the NSS] throws overboard the idea that multilateral regimes and global agreements are effective ways to disarmament and non-proliferation.” [8]

The End of Deterrence

The attacks of September 11 supposedly showed that traditional approaches of dealing with weapons of mass destruction, terrorist organizations and rogue states – deterrence, containment and arms control – do not function any more after the Cold War. “Deterrence based only on a threat of retaliation hardly succeeds against leaders of rogue states who are ready to take risks” (NSS, p.15).

Firstly, the danger since September 11 has drastically increased since, as Cheney stresses, “old security doctrines are not valid any more. Control or restraint is not possible when dictators court weapons of mass destruction and are ready to share these with

terrorists intent on inflicting catastrophic casualties on the United States.” [9] The possession or even the mere attempt to gain weapons of mass destruction represents an intolerable danger justifying military intervention according to the US government. The US government does not provide any plausible evidence here. Rather everything indicates that “rogue states” can be deterred both from an attack on the US or its allies and from passing weapons of mass destruction to terrorists. A consistent arms control – which is rejected by the US government – would prevent access to dangerous weapons. Nevertheless the NSS adopts this threat analysis.

“Preventive action” – War on Suspicion

Since there are no possibilities of deterring dictators and terrorists from attacks on the US except for military intervention, the US government authorizes itself or gives itself permission to act preventively in the future. Therefore the NSS (p.6) urges “removing the danger before it reaches our borders” since the US “will not hesitate to exercise its right to self-defense through preemptive action if necessary.” On account of the supposedly threatening dangers, the US government claims the right to carry out attacks without a clearly demonstrable or immediately imminent aggression. Wars on suspicion represent a clear breach of international law.

According to the Caroline clause of 1837 still valid today, preventive actions are only permissible in international law when “the immediate necessity of self-defense exists and is overwhelming and neither a choice of means nor a possibility of negotiations remains. [...] A war to nip in the bud the appearance of a danger is prohibited. [...] Preemptive war is de facto an offensive war.”[10]

Nuclear Experimental Games

The frightening scenario that results from connecting the Bush doctrine with the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) is obvious though not mentioned explicitly in the NSS. The NPR contains the foundations for future US nuclear policy worked out by the Pentagon. As per NPR, “nuclear weapons can be used against targets able to resist non-nuclear attacks.” [11] Since destroying these preemptively by nuclear weapons seems allowed since production- and storage sites of weapons of mass destruction cannot be de-

stroyed.

Considering these plans for combating nuclear proliferation, the assessment of the British Labor delegate Alice Mahon can be underscored: "The made have taken control in the White House." [12] However this madness regrettably has a method. Further wars for strengthening US predominance are prepared since "a global Pax Americana cannot be maintained by itself." [13]

With the NSS, the US government gives a blank check to attack nearly every country on mere suspicion and without conclusive evidence. "A policy of possible military preemption hammers the last nail in the coffin of Article 51 of the UN Charter that only allows self-defense as a reaction to an armed attack." [14] Washington's present Iraqi policy confirms this fear.

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The United States cobbles together a legitimization model allowing its presence wherever US interests are endangered and conditions must be put straight. In "Welt", Herbert Kremp says Washington aims explicitly at expansion of its influence: "The Bush doctrine will not be limited in its development to removing terrorist underground forces and their accessories. Its consistent decree implies expansion in three directions:

- control of central Asian transfer states from Kaukasus to Hindukusch;
- prevention of Islamic seizure of power in Saudi Arabia;
- concentration of interest in Irfan, India and China where new power agglomerations arise." [15]

Thomas Donnelly, member of the Project for the American Century, one of the influential rallying points of the hardliners, also describes the landmark character of the Bush doctrine: "Since September 11, President George W. Bush has learned that being a modest hegemon is hard. [...] Therefore the Bush doctrine is an expression of the decision of the president to maintain and extend the Pax Americana all over the Middle East and beyond." [16] The Bush doctrine dictates a code of conduct at the edge of submission." [17]

Showdown in Prague

The US seemed willing to put an ultimatum to its allies at the NATO summit on November

21/22, 2002 in Prague. As President Bush already demonstrated to the UN, Washington urges the unconditional adoption of the new US strategy – preventive attacks (under circumstances even of a nuclear attack) for preventing proliferation, including the legitimated attack on Iraq. Otherwise NATO's loss of meaning is threatened by hearkening to primarily Ad-hoc alliances in the future. In January, US Senator Richard Lugar made this threat in a speech before NATO arranged with Bush. "NATO will no longer be the most important alliance that it always was and will be increasingly marginalized by not facing the most pressing security threat for our countries [...]." [18]

The term "multilateralism a la carte" from Richard Haase, the director of the political planning division in the US State Department summarizes this state of affairs. International agreements and organizations are only considered or supported when they clearly submit to Washington's projects.

An adoption or acceptance of the Bush doctrine by the European NATO states is insinuated even though US policy is still criticized particularly by France and Germany. Thus all governments welcome and take seriously the proposal for an Anti-Terror task force presented by US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and NATO general secretary George Robertson that can act preemptively and "out of area". [19]

Farewell to International Law

European states should clearly reject this extremely aggressive variant of US hegemonic policy in Prague. By adopting the US doctrine, the European states would break international law and commit a clear breach of the constitution by supporting offensive wars. An adoption of the US nuclear strategy in NATO must be rejected and the nuclear participation making Germany an accessory of preemptive nuclear attacks annulled.

This had catastrophic consequences for international law that is not law binding in the classical sense. International law attempts to create mutual obligations, treaties etc, a system of norms, rules and values reducing the likelihood of wars. The cancellation of the state right of sovereignty by the US valid since 1648 now has dramatic consequences. Thus the Russian governments with their of-

fensive threats against Georgia explicitly accepted the US Anti-Terror approach. [20] The US hegemonic strategy should be condemned for moral reasons and also because of its escalating character for international relations. One decisive characteristic of the NSS is that "the new Grand Strategy ascribes little importance to international stability." [21]

Endnotes

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- [4] Rebuilding America's defenses, S. IV
- [5] Für eine Analyse und Kritik der theoretischen Grundlagen der US-Hegemonialpolitik, deren Legitimationsstrategien und ihrer Umsetzung in die Praxis vgl. Wagner, Jürgen, Das ewige Imperium: Die US-Außenpolitik als Krisenfaktor, Hamburg 2002
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- [8] Schmitt, Gary, "A Case of Continuity", in: The National Interest, No. 69 (Fall 2002)
- [9] Knowlton, Brian, "War talk by Cheney is tougher", IHT, 27.2.02
- [10] Leicht, Robert, "Ein Ultimatum an die Völkergemeinschaft", Die Zeit, 39/02; Auch Henry Kissinger macht auf die Tragweite der neuen Doktrin aufmerksam: "Dieser neue Ansatz ist revolutionär. Die Ablösung einer fremden Regierung zum Gegenstand militärischer Drohungen und möglicher Interventionen zu machen, stellt das gesamte System des Westfälischen Friedens von 1648 infrage, dessen Grundlage die Nichteinmischung fremder Mächte in die internen Angelegenheiten souveräner Staaten ist. Ebenso steht die Bereitschaft der USA zu »gerechtfertigten Präventivschlägen« im völligen Gegensatz zum modernen Völkerrecht. Der Einsatz von Waffengewalt ist ausschließlich zur Selbstverteidigung erlaubt – gegen eine tatsächliche, nicht eine potenzielle Bedro-
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