

From Princeton, a new power paradigm

By Chibli Mallat

Commentary by

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A new and influential report just released by the Woodrow Wilson School, titled "Forging a World of Liberty Under Law, US National Security in the 21st Century," underlines the one major flaw of the Bush administration's policy since September 11, 2001: the absence of law and of a legal process in the projection of American leadership. Directed by the dean of the school, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and her colleague John Ikenberry, it is the result of three years of intensive bipartisan debate involving over 400 prominent people from academia, the policy-making community, and the media in the United States, including former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, Newsweek International editor Fareed Zakaria and former Secretary of State George Shultz. The Slaughter report operates as a post-modern multi-layered problem solver, addressing such problems as terrorism, China, AIDS and other pandemics, global warming, energy and infrastructures. It is ambitious, and seeks the defining status of the famous "X article" by George Kennan on the strategy of "containment" published in Foreign Affairs magazine in 1947. One of the groundbreaking suggestions concerns the United Nations system. The report calls for co-opting more countries as permanent members to the Security Council, and the dilution of the veto. But this is not what is original. Considering the countless and sterile attempts to improve "le machin," as Charles de Gaulle called the international organization, UN reforms are doomed to drown in the shifting sands of the status quo. Where the Princeton report does offer something new is in the principle that if the UN fails to act in an egregious situation, then a well-structured, carefully built-up "concert of democracies" should fill the gap. To get there, however, a structure of PAR (Popular, Accountable and Rights-regarding) governments is proposed - governments that openly espouse liberal democracy and act proactively with other like-minded countries and societies. This provides in international terms a rough equivalent of what Robert Fossaert called in a seminal book in 1991, "le monde façon Europe," or "the world in the way of Europe": You're in if you follow liberal democratic standards; you stay behind, and are accountable in due course to your own people for this, if you do not. The report even draws up an appropriate charter to establish the proposed concert of democracies. Perhaps not coincidentally, in one of his first speeches during World War I President Woodrow Wilson called for "a concert of free countries." This is an idea worth strongly supporting: We could have a decisive majority of the democratic world working in concert by 2030. China remains a massive problem, but one should trust that a non-violent democratic revolution will succeed sooner or later there.

Lebanon does not appear prominently in the Princeton report. Perhaps it is too weak for its Cedar Revolution to represent a model for the Middle East. My vision may be blurred, but I continue to see the extraordinary value of the Cedar Revolution as a model of non-violence for the region. Despite the ugly summer war between Israel and Hizbullah, those of us who believe in the uniqueness of our revolution should stay the course of non-violence, and produce the leadership needed to offer Lebanon as a successful model. Given the present battle over the future of the Lebanese government, and over the presidency, not much will move for the foreseeable future. But Lebanon remains vital for liberty under the law, and like-minded Lebanese should work to enter such a concert of nations if and when it is established. In the larger world of pressing issues, liberty under law means closing the Guantanamo Bay prison, adhering to due process and habeas corpus, rejecting torture unconditionally, supporting and strengthening the International Criminal Court and respecting and strengthening the Geneva Conventions. These details are not spelled out in the Princeton report, but the overarching spirit of the document goes clearly in that direction. The current US administration is often impatient with law and justice, and a recent Congressional bill has not helped matters by effectively allowing the president to continue widening the net of "enemy combatants," and to deprive them of their basic constitutional right to a hearing before a normal court. I cannot understand why this is being done, and why the Bush administration continues to ignore that liberty under law that is a necessary foundation of a world order shaped by America. As Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson once observed about the US Constitution: International law is not a suicide pact. When embraced, it offers a formidable array of tools for redress. We have already seen how authoritarian countries in the Middle East have happily embraced the US drift to lawlessness, which justifies their own abuse of power and of human rights. One hopes that the Princeton report serves as a wake-up call when it comes to the most severe danger to the world: a US collapse into unchecked rule of force. If "liberty under law" replaces "containment" as the paradigm of the 21st century, we would all be better off.

Chibli Mallat, a Lebanese presidential candidate, is a visiting professor at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University. "*Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century*," can be read on www.wws.princeton.edu/ppns. He wrote this commentary for **THE DAILY STAR**.