Bound to Follow? US Foreign Policy, International Reactions, and the New Complexities of Sovereignty

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Preface

The following paper was presented by Louis W. Pauly, Canada Research Chair, Professor of Political Science, and Director of the Center for International Studies of the University of Toronto on 20 April 2005 at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, where he was the inaugural Roberta Buffett Visiting Professor in Political Science.

A few years ago, it seemed that the world within and beyond the university was becoming more open, a place where our students, future leaders, would naturally develop deep knowledge of people not necessarily like themselves. 9-11 triggered an understandable if regrettable movement in the opposite direction. The pendulum seems now to be swinging back, but the evidence at this point is decidedly mixed. Fear and trauma do strange things to the mind, and the collective mind of the United States — and of its key allies — is perhaps only now beginning to recover.

My theme in this paper deals with an important dimension of the psychological and political challenge of recovering our balance and restoring the circumstances under which we all might return to the path of global openness. After 1941, the United States learned how to lead, which means that it somehow, perhaps not completely consciously, came to understand why followers followed. In part, after the war ended, the United States and its major allies institutionalized this knowledge in discrete international organizations, which they pretended to be technical but knew to be profoundly political. Eventually, I will argue, they affected the way Americans think about their own sovereignty. It would be nice to believe that wisdom and foresight found expression in this way; in truth, the twilight struggle of the Cold War probably provided the real incentive.

As I argued in a book on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) a few years ago (Pauly 1997), in a bid to stabilize the system long after its post-war unipolar moment had passed, the United States decided in the mid-1970s to make surprising concessions, concessions which set a standard for follower states. Eventually, through a series of agreements and understandings so densely textured and so thickly institutionalized that it became difficult to imagine their abrogation, the American state rendered itself meaningfully accountable to other states. At the very least, it agreed to account publicly for domestic economic policies that had an impact beyond its sovereign borders.

The most explicit obligation in this respect was embedded in the second amendment to the IMF's Articles of Agreement. Although neither the United States nor the other signatories to the Articles acknowledged lines of direct political responsibility for the citizens of other states, they did accept a new legal obligation that subtly altered a traditionalist understanding of the external dimension of their sovereignty. As the leading state in a system designed to tend toward economic, social, and cultural openness, the United States did so to model behaviour for others. Through that modeling and through

the institutional working-out of the accountability commitment, it attempted to construct compatible political identities in other states. These identities combined enduring nationalism with increasing openness. In short, as I will explain more fully, the United States thereby created a key condition for followership.

In our justifiable fascination with the subject of leadership, we scholars of international relations have left the phenomenon of followership undertheorized. I will return to this point, but I want first to underline the fact that partly through formal and informal institutions that set the foundations for the globalization of economy and society during the past sixty years, the United States set out deliberately to blur the boundaries around its polity. Without fanfare, over time it also opened its internal decision-making structures to others; it became more acceptable, for example, for foreign states to lobby the Congress.

I am an American citizen born in Pennsylvania, who in 1978 married very happily into a terrific Canadian family. At this point, over half of my life has been spent in Canada, of which I am now also a citizen. My new homeland is similar, but not too similar, to my old homeland. It took a few years for me to understand the depth of the commitment, even stubborn insistence, of Canadians to be American but not United States-ian. But for them, learning to live in the blurry spaces between recognizable political communities is nothing new. Where does the French nation in Canada end? Where do Franco-Ontarians, whose ancestors date back to the early seventeenth century, fit? Do the Inuit constitute a separate people with collective as well as individual rights? How sovereign can a people be when they dare not express their nationalism too obviously for fear of destroying their federation, and, in any case, when a final break from the mother country has never actually been made? How sovereign can they be when they have long depended for their prosperity on massive American investment and trade? How sovereign can they be when the purpose of their borders long ago ceased to be to defend the indefensible and is now reconceived to be a porous filter, one letting in all the best influences from the United States and, increasingly unsuccessfully, limiting at least some of what Canadians collectively consider to be the worst? The term semi-sovereignty seems apt, a term now often used to describe member states of the new European Union. But is the term really alien to the United States itself?

Sometime between 1989 and 9-11, Americans began to forget that the great contemporary policy experiment in intentionally blurring the boundaries between sovereign polities was their idea, their spectacularly successful idea. In this very hall last week, the distinguished French journalist, François Sergent, explained to us that it no longer mattered to Europeans whether the United States withdrew all of its residual military forces from the continent. He argued that they were no longer needed to undergird a regional policy-making machinery that had now decisively transcended once-hostile nation-states. I hope and believe that he is right. If he is, then surely post-war American foreign policy, both enlightened and self-interested, deserves some of the credit.

In a book I just completed with a distinguished group of Canadian, German, and American colleagues (Grande and Pauly 2005), our theme is the evolution of the *cooperation state* at the core of the global system. We examine polities that retain formal legal sovereignty, but that cannot achieve even central domestic objectives without compromising their effective operational sovereignty. To retain any meaning, in short, their de facto sovereignty deserves the adjective *complex* as a modifier. In the absence of cooperative dynamics of decision, their citizens would become demonstrably less prosperous, less healthy, and less secure. Our French visitor had good instincts! But his conclusion testified to the enormous and historic success of sixty years of determined and remarkably coherent US foreign policy in Europe and beyond.

How then should we account for the following episodes?

Episode 1: At a recent meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, Doug Feith, the influential but soon-to-retire undersecretary of defence bemoaned the vagueness of the term "global governance," and explained that, "the United States strengthens its national security when it promotes a well-ordered world of sovereign states."

Episode 2: Last week, the normally solid and careful reasoning of David Brooks in the *New York Times* was deployed to defend John Bolton's nomination to be the new US ambassador to the UN. Europeans, Brooks bristled, "are content to champion creeping institutions like the International Criminal Court. They treat UN General Assembly resolutions as an emerging body of international law. They believe some supranational authority should be set up to settle international disputes by rule of law…We'll never accept such things, because they are undemocratic…they inevitably devolve into corruption, and we love our Constitution."

Episode 3: Three months ago, I participated in a public roundtable in Canada on related issues. One of the speakers had just retired from the country's foreign service. He represented for me the stereotypical and highly accomplished mandarin, the pragmatic, loyal official with a long career of service to governments of every political stripe, a man who knew Canada and its changing place in the world in intimate detail. Let me paraphrase what he said: "Frankly, recent events have led me to the following conclusion. On North American matters, we have to find ways to deal constructively with the United States. But on international matters, matters beyond our shared continent, the interests of Canadians and Americans now diverge. It is dangerous for us to be associated with them." I could hardly believe my ears, and I said so in my response.

Episode 4: An amazingly energetic team of scholars recently published a painful series of documents entitled *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib* (Greenberg and Dratel 2005). Reviews inside the United States and around the world have converged. As Wesley Wark summed it up in his published review (*Globe and Mail* 12 March 2005): "The US government has made a terrible mistake in forgoing the Geneva conventions, an error that it may never repair, even if it wished to. In the absence of constraints of fundamental respect for an occupied population, some part of the soul of the occupying power itself is lost."

Episode 5: According to large-scale public opinion polling by a team based at the University of Maryland and the Brookings Institution, when people in twenty-three countries were asked recently whether the United States had a positive or negative influence on the world today, a majority or plurality in fifteen countries came down on the negative side, while in only four did a majority or plurality see US influence as positive. At the other end of the spectrum, with twenty votes on the positive side and only one on the negative was France.

Enough. We all have our own related episodes to recount, our own debates with family and friends, our own recent experience of the world's recent reaction to American power.

Perhaps most of the negativity around the world as well as internally is a straightforward reaction to George W. Bush and the regrettable diplomacy of his first administration, which helped dissipate the massive international sympathy generated for the United States by the events of 9-11. But much of it was surely inflamed by the fact that France, Russia, and even Canada, in my humble opinion, stretched criticism far beyond the bounds of the acceptable in the run-up to the Iraq War, after a majority of Americans had come to agree with their president that an overriding objective of national

security was at stake.

But the phenomenon I am exploring here really pre-dates the ascendancy of the President and the rise of Osama bin Laden and his ilk. It extends back to the end of the Cold War, when the United States itself started to take for granted the conditions underpinning an American-led global order. Those conditions had successfully encouraged and sustained followership.

Followership is not synonymous with discipleship. It involves a significant degree of autonomy in the follower, and rests on active, dynamic decision-making. It involves conditional choice. Research on followership is dominated by the work of psychologists, sociologists, and organization theorists, and I admit that to transpose it to the concerns of international relations requires a risky leap. It is a leap worth taking.

The literature suggests that people follow leaders for three main reasons: utility, identity, and values. When a utilitarian calculus is all that motivates followers, a leader needs direct mechanisms of influence and intrusive means of surveillance, and it must provide constantly recalculated reminders of the benefits of compliance. In contrast, when identity motivates followers, a sense of belonging draws them in to repeated encounters with the leader, the leader attracts more than demands, and there is an expectation of a continuing two-way relationship. Finally, when values motivate followers, there is a deeply shared perception of normative congruence, means and ends on both sides are synchronically reconceptualized as the external environment changes, and a basic internalization occurs in any negotiation process. Stark lines around the authority of the leader begin to fade.

Any parents will recognize these categories. If we have succeeded in the difficult task of bringing along the next generation, we all know that it is by the grace of God, or by pure luck, if you are not theologically-inclined. But surely we hope that we have helped, and if we reflect for a moment, we probably could agree that as our children grew up, we experimented with all three strategies to encourage followership. When they were three years old, we clearly demonstrated the personal advantages of following our lead. When they were twelve, we hoped they admired us and were routinely attracted to sharing in our multi-faceted identities. Of course, a few short years later, many of us were back to utilitarianism and constant bargaining, but the terrible teen-age years did not last forever. Afterwards, if we were skillful, our children embedded our basic values in their own personalities and perhaps we adjusted to some of their values in turn; followership became so routinized that they and we ceased to think about it.

Again, drawing analogies in the world of international relations is an imperfect exercise. The United States never had the autonomy or the capacity to be the parent of the post-1945 system. But in the exceptional circumstances created by intervention in two world wars and in the subsequent struggle against communism, the American people came to accept the necessity of their state attempting to steer future global developments. Whether they will continue to accept that necessity is the key to the future of American hegemony, for in the near-term anyway there is no exogenous force on earth capable of dislodging it. At least for the moment, all the talk of balancing and mobilizing counterforce seems empty. Harvard professor Joseph Nye once famously said that the United States is "bound to lead." I think the really serious question is whether Americans can continue to be convinced of that. And here is where followership comes back in. It is in the fundamental interest of others that Americans continue to lead. Followers wield an influence that will help determine whether they will do so.

It is plausible to argue that for most of the post-war period, the United States bore most of the costs of

system maintenance and also gained the largest share of the benefits. Utilitarian calculations among follower states could have emphasized the former and discounted the latter. Conversely, it would have been in the narrow American interest to obfuscate both, certainly if a domestic consensus were to hold and if followers were to be convinced to move beyond strict cost-benefit calculations. In fact, international institutions built around the American political identity helped accomplish just such an objective. Beyond open markets, rule of law, and a basic commitment to participation in decision-making by both the authors and the targets of decision, key institutions evolved over time to include, as I mentioned before, deeper accountability measures, but also more binding dispute-settlement procedures and greater opportunities for followers to exercise voice. Despite what Jeremy Rabkin, John Bolton, Doug Feith, David Brooks, and other "new sovereigntists" say, Americans never gave up the Constitution which they love, but they did find ways to blur the boundaries around the sacred text. As generations of students of international relations have learned, *they* created a world of *complex interdependence*.

In our new book, my colleagues and I contend that the ultimate political consequence was the movement by the United States itself to embrace a notion of *complex sovereignty*. It did so deliberately and it did so successfully precisely to reconstruct political identities around the world, the durability of which would make the world safer for Americans. What seems clear now is that what it did not do is succeed in encouraging enduring followership based on value congruence. For a brief moment during the 1990s, Americans managed to convince themselves that the world shared not just certain procedural preferences but also their most basic values. If parts of the world still held out, they seemed to believe, then the manifold pressures of globalization would eventually force convergence. In this light, the United States pushed the international institutions it created too hard. This is all very debatable; indeed, international relations and comparative politics scholars are now far along in such debate, whether we label pieces of it "varieties of capitalism," "system transformation," "the political economy of transition," "structural adjustment, " "the politics of international legalization," or "the diffusion of liberalization."

My point for now, however, is that, even aside from any policy mistakes, recent American actions encouraged follower states and societies to retreat from anything like value-based motivations. Extravagantly tightening borders in North America, for example, a futile exercise if ever there was one, eroded seemingly entrenched identity-based motivations for followership, and prompted key followers to rely once again on utilitarian calculations. This, in turn, will certainly make it more difficult for Americans to shape the kind of world they want in the future. More imminently, it will make much more difficult the task of convincing the American people themselves to continue bearing a disproportionate share of the costs of system maintenance.

Nevertheless, I personally remain optimistic. The United States and the most powerful follower states have recently begun to understand the full dimensions of our collective problem after the trauma of the past four years. The pendulum is swinging, I think, and if we look carefully we can see cooperation states in action. Perhaps key Bush Administration spokespeople are lying when they talk about The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the Millennium Challenge Account, UN reform, the importance of reaching some kind of consensus between developed and developing countries sufficient to complete the Doha trade round, and market-based but state-influenced solutions to the debt burdens of poor countries. Perhaps they are lying, but I doubt it. Perhaps they are lying when they now acknowledge that the United States needs serious financial and other kinds of help if the demographic bomb ticking in the broader Middle East is not to explode, both figuratively and literally. Again, I doubt it.

Could we have arrived at this point with less mess and uncertainty? Yes, indeed. But focusing more on the conditions of followership might help us all quickly restore what can be restored and to move ahead.

By way of conclusion, here is another way to phrase the challenge, both for policy-makers and for scholars. Cooperation states shift governing authority, not just tacit power, in the direction of institutions capable of promoting political trade-offs at the appropriate level. We would expect institutions capable of identifying and brokering such trade-offs to be difficult to create and sustain. But that expectation should be the beginning of debate on related questions, not the end of it.

The crises of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries could come to be associated with a dawning realization on the part of states and peoples that their destinies are now inextricably bound together and that therefore they must accept the inevitable task of constructing a global Leviathan to resolve the fundamental dilemmas implied by the existence of a global commons. If they eventually came together in a way that rendered collective power legitimate as well as effective at the global level, we could be certain that a key component of political authority in the modern world would have been reconstituted. But would this not be too hard a test? And indeed, is not thinking about it this way the very reason why opinions have become inflamed and rigid national sovereigntists resurgent?

Consider the essential task confronting the founders of the United States. In the aftermath of the Revolution, there was significant confusion about how political authority should be reconstructed. No one, however, argued that a true Leviathan was needed. Indeed, the very notion was anathema, even to proponents of a strong national government. Political authority itself would, in the end, wind up being subjected to a permanent contest. It would not, however, be rendered unnecessary. Order and efficient governance, the consensus among the American founders held, needed to be balanced against fundamental expectations of liberty. Justice, moreover, would continually have to be discerned and reinterpreted in light of that ever-changing balance. In times of supreme national crisis, of course, order might trump liberty and simple justice might be deferred. The reconstitution of authority in the early United States, especially as it evolved in practice, allowed for such exceptional circumstances. In "normal" times, however, the continuous recalibration of that balance was facilitated, not frustrated, by intentionally leaving political authority divided and deliberately obscuring the borderlines around it. As it turned out, this penchant well suited the industrial economic system that would begin to arise during the next century.

So why should we now demand to see hard evidence of the emergence of a Leviathan at the global level before we concede that the notion of constructing global political authority is at least a possibility? Of course, we can rule it out by definition, and be guided by our fears more than by our hopes. If the very nature of the international system is held to be radically anarchical, only the fleeting delegation of authority by sovereign actors can occur at the global level. At best, we might be able to imagine the emergence of a kind of primitive rule in an organic society of states, constantly calculating their narrow interests. Such views still constitute key elements of the core disciplinary paradigm within the international relations field, and much of research therein understandably highlights the fragile nature of international political authority. But are we not missing something important when we take that fragility to signal the end of the story?

Again, a fundamental purpose of the international organizations created after World War II was to encourage followership and thereby to render the burdens of leadership politically tolerable inside the United States. With luck, the current painful phase of adapting those organizations and creating new, perhaps less formal ones will ultimately reflect a complicated process of social learning. Such an

optimistic view becomes especially compelling after we subject the main alternatives to critical scrutiny: that national governments seriously believe their citizens are willing to bear the full costs of abandoning serious and deepening multilateralism, or that the complicated politics of collaboration among states primed for cooperation has been superseded by the automaticity, the purely self-regulated discipline, of markets.

Human beings have never lived in the "well-ordered world of sovereign states." And whenever we have approached that dreamy nirvana, it has turned into a catastrophic nightmare. Sixty years ago, Americans decisively turned away from any such vision. Sometimes, they made their leaders pretend to be doing something else. But the idea of rendering sovereignty more complex, more opaque, and more progressive began with them. They can certainly turn another way in our time. Let us hope that wisdom guides them differently.

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