



Here is a simple but fundamental question, which was at the heart of the Iraq war controversy: how is the global village to run and be governed? It's the hidden basis of the political conflicts in the UN over Iraq and similar issues.

The inescapable fact is that we are moving further every day to a one-world economy without a one-world government or legal structure.

Last-century thinking describes a world of nation states, where national sovereignty is absolute and cannot be violated under international law except to resist aggression and in self-defence. That was the French and German position on the war with Iraq and it has very powerful historical precedent.

But life has moved on. We will need a new model altogether if we are to live in prosperity and peace during the third millennium. That's because at least 4 billion people are already living in towns, cities or rural areas which are profoundly affected by globalisation and the techno-communication revolution. They are already citizens of the global village, or the global nation of all nations.

The start of a new world order began with war in Iraq

Since the collapse of Communism we have seen the beginnings of a new world order: all nations working together in a semi-democratic global body to seek the common good, for the whole of humanity. It may be primitive and rather ineffective, but is becoming more significant.

In the last decade the UN has grown in stature from a feeble committee weakened by bickering, paralysed by a tiny minority of countries who had the right of veto. The UN has become a stronger unifying force in world affairs. That's why sharp debates over how to discipline Iraq's government have been all the more shocking.

But don't be misled by aggressive speeches: when you think back to the days of the Cold War, the consensus amongst developed nations in early 2003 for some kind of significant UN intervention in Iraq's affairs was overwhelming by historical standards, although you would have been forgiven for thinking the opposite from the media coverage of UN voting intentions.

Lesson from the Cold War

During the Cold War, any threat of military invasion of a country by Russia or America would have produced in most cases immediate counter-threats by the other. As a result most wars were waged by proxy in far away places, between small nations funded and armed by both superpowers.

But in March 2003, despite all the hot air, not one nation in the world offered to fight for Saddam and protect Iraq from American invasion, least of all Russia or China. Not one other national army offered soldiers or weapons to protect Iraq national sovereignty, to liberate the people of Bagdad from foreign US-dominated forces, to underpin survival of the Saddam regime.

Sure, some nations held back, abstaining, remaining neutral. Some national leaders were making strong statements of protest - but these turned out to be only words, not backed by bullets. Where were the countries lining up to sell hundreds of high-tech missiles or tanks or planes to Iraq?

So the strange reality is that while it appears at first sight that the new fragile world order is crumbling into the dust, the opposite may be the case. Of course much depend on how Iraq instably settles or flares, the early and "successful" withdrawal of US and other foreign troops, life for the Iraqi people post-withdrawal, and the impact on the region as a whole.

The current tensions and conflicts may well fuel further waves of terrorism, especially if the US fails to take a powerful lead, together with international support, to help establish a "just" Middle East peace settlement for both Palestinians and Israelis. It may also lead to destabilising regime

changes in other Arab nations, replacing family dynasties with anti-American Islamic fundamentalism in countries like Saudi Arabia. But the current spats are unlikely to lead to destruction of the UN, nor the break up of the EU, nor the rapid neutering of American power - quite the opposite.

The world is far more united than words suggest

The truth is that most nations of the world united in condemnation of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and again in imposing sanctions of many kinds over more than a decade since. They united again post-9/11 in a coalition against terror and more recently in insisting that UN-monitored disarmament took place.

When it came to discussions about weapons inspections and the threat of armed intervention, disagreement was almost entirely over process rather than substance: how disarmament should be achieved, measured, monitored and if necessary imposed, and over what timescale? At what point should the international community conclude that all alternatives to armed intervention have been exhausted? What form should military intervention take under such circumstances? How should it be led and financed? How should the peace be kept, reconstruction proceed and national autonomy be re-established?

Our memories are short. The level of multinational consensus about the need if necessary to intervene in the affairs of rogue states is extraordinary and unusual in world history.

That is why there is such a consensus about Iran now amongst France, Germany, Russia, UK, US, China, India and many other less powerful nations about the need for the international community to act by force if necessary, if Iran continues despite many warnings with an active programme to rapidly develop nuclear warheads.

And so we return to the global village – or rather the global nation of all humanity.

Economically, the world is already operating as a single closely inter-related organism. The problem is that mechanisms for governance, law and order are still primitive – feudal or medieval in nature. We have yet to grow up.

So we have “cities” in the global nation behaving like little kingdoms, taking the law into their own hands whenever it suits them (Russia and America), while at other times appealing to the “government” to impose common will on others.

What of the future? Life after the Iraq war will never be the same

Expect the world-wide love-hate relationship with America to become even more polarised, on the one hand hungrily devouring American media culture, on the other hand increasingly bitter and resentful at American power and lack of sensitivity to how the rest of the world works.

Expect new generations of [terrorists](#) to take courage and exact “revenge”, with the aim of “wounding American pride and arrogance”. Every one of them will tell you they are fighting for a higher moral cause.

Expect America to continue to feel deeply hurt, increasingly isolated and angry, the target of frequent terror attacks and general animosity in many places, acting forcefully around the world wherever it feels national interests dictate, and withdrawing to lick its wounds when it does not.

Expect America to be increasingly hostile to the idea of submitting in any respect whatsoever to the will of the global majority, whether on the environment, trade agreements or any other matter, and to be in even less mood to compromise than pre-Iraq War. Expect the US at the same time to make intensive diplomatic efforts to try to win back lost friends, but with ever-deepening suspicion of UN controls, inefficiency, corruption and influence.

In contrast, expect almost the entire rest of the world to invest intensively in the UN as the sole vehicle for solving complex international issues, in a quest to create a more sustainable and peaceful future.

Expect the EU to forge ahead with renewed energy to create structures to balance US power economically and militarily. But the EU will be severely restrained by ongoing internal conflicts, which will be made worse by every new country joining, as well as by unfolding events. Expect the UK to be frozen out of significant decisions by France and Germany who will seize every chance to dominate the future of the EU together, and to humiliate the US. Expect UK doubts to grow about whether it will ever sit comfortably within a Franco-German led federation of EU states. Expect France and Germany to be increasingly worried about rapid enlargement, and

dilution of their power by pro-US nations with shaky economies, arguing passionately that the world will be a better place if there is a significant European counter-balance to the US.

Expect several non-European nations to embark on dangerous military adventures, arguing that the US has set a new model for them to copy: “legally” invading other countries when they could possibly be a future threat. India and Pakistan, North and South Korea and so on. These local wars could produce huge problems for the future stability of the world. Expect concerns about this to lead to calls for stronger structures and processes within the UN.

Reforming the UN as a more democratic global authority

A key challenge will be to reform the UN so that it can become more effective and fair as a federation of nations. The current powers of veto are anti-democratic and smack of nineteenth century tyranny, held as they are by very few supremely powerful, wealthy nations.

The UN will only carry true global moral authority when each nation is able to cast votes in proportion to its contribution to global population, so that each citizen is represented equally without fear or favour. But this is an unthinkable prospect.

Even an idea of such a global assembly will provoke huge reactions in wealthy nations, because it strikes to the root of the most important unsolved problem on the planet today: the fact that most people are extremely poor, with no voice and no vote in world affairs, living off less than \$2 a day.

Why global democracy is so unpopular

And so we find an interesting fact: those who live in democratic nations, who uphold democracy as the only honourable form of government, are not really true democrats after all. They have little or no interest in global democracy, in a nation of nations, in seeking the common good of the whole of humanity.

And it is this single fact, more than any other, this inequality of wealth and privilege in our shrinking global village, that will make it more likely that our future is dominated by terror groups, freedom fighters, justice-seekers, hell-raisers, protestors and violent agitators.

The lesson of history is that tyrannies and dictatorships get overthrown, that the will of the majority eventually finds a voice and freedom.

And that is exactly what will eventually happen in our non-democratic, dysfunctional, unjust, global village.

We cannot wind back the clock

We cannot wind the clock back fifty years to a cosy world where these country by country contrasts no longer matter. CNN and Hollywood have seen to that.

On TV screens in the poorest slums on earth, millions of people see their wealthy neighbours go about their daily lives while they scabble in the dust to find money for basic food and shelter. They have seen the truth.

The digital society created the global village and globalisation the basic rules for trading within it, but neither has taught us how to live together in such a small cultural space. This is the greatest moral challenge of our time.

In a future world where small numbers of activists will wield unimagineable power with dirty bombs, nuclear devices, chemical weapons and strange viruses, our very survival will depend on finding a way to live together in harmony, with freedom and justice for all.

And that will require further extrensions of global governance.

History may record that it took us many decades, possibly, to agree to it – but what will be the pain along the way?