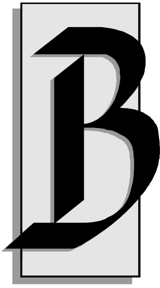

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Force, Legitimacy, and Order

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It is an honor to take part in a celebration of Raymond Aron, which precedes more commemorations in 2005, the year of the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth. Even though I was never formally his student, he was my mentor. If I had to summarize what I owe him, two points are essential. First, I owe him a way of thinking, Weberian in origin, but without Weber's belief in a rigid separation of facts and values and without Weber's relativism. Secondly, I owe him a conviction that lucidity is a duty, that liberalism needs to be without illusions, but that the pure and simple submission to reality is not acceptable either. In international relations in particular, a way must be found to combine the "ethic" of struggle—the logic of "us vs. them"—with a Kantian ethic of peace and cooperation.

The world has changed a great deal since Aron, in *Peace and War* (1962), gave us his analysis of the international system. During the Cold War, both camps had each on its side and by agreement between them, they made a certain type of order prevail and preserved global peace through the fear of nuclear annihilation. There was room in fact for only one obviously imperfect but realistic formula for world order. It was an order in which legitimacy and normativity were to be assured by the United Nations, i.e. by the society of states, with the United States as the dominant secular force at the service of the rules and principles to whose creation it had mightily contributed. This order supposed an internationalist America, skillful not only in the use of force but also in the use of "soft power," the capacity to attract and to convince. In resorting to force, such an America would have had to respect the rules of the game and use the institutions which it so largely contributed to creating after 1945.

This world order has been transformed by two unforeseen factors. The first is globalization which, for better and worse, has eroded the sovereignty of states. In many instances, this erosion has created disintegrating states and led to increasing numbers of civil conflicts. Terrorism and violence have been universalized, giving rise to a world society of fanatics, nihilists, and the desperadoes and the humiliated of all countries. The second is the abandonment by Washington of the role it has so successfully played since 1945, both by choice and by necessity, in the fight against the Soviet Union. This had been a role of cooperation and multilateralism. Current U.S. policy prefers to treat the allies as a mass of subordinates; it has divided or marginalized those institutions that were not sufficiently docile and resorted to "coalitions of the willing," recruited by Washington, relegated the UN to secondary tasks and proclaimed the right of the dominant nation to choose among international norms those that suited it. It is as if the terrorists and the

state that declared unlimited war on them had colluded to play the role of gravediggers of a very fragile international order which the first President Bush had helped to build.

All of this makes the battle of the ethic of struggle and the ethic of cooperation only more intense. The war in Iraq has pitted with extraordinary clarity the view of international affairs as a domain in which force is ultimately what matters, against a view that emphasizes the duties of cooperation, the role of "soft power" and what Aron called the dawn of universal consciousness.

The problem with a conception centered on force is simple: force is perfect for destroying, and there are indeed many valid targets for destruction—terrorists, murderous regimes, and horrific weapons. But even in the fight against terrorism, force is only one tool among many others. When it comes to other essential tasks: reconstruction, state building, the fight against misery and for development in the world, the harnessing and conservation of resources, the protection of the environment, force's role is far more humble.

Those of us who remain liberals—Aronian liberals—stress the need for a kind of international legitimacy that will allow, and convince, the mighty to put their force at the service of causes deemed right and just by a majority of states *and* peoples; this is, after all, what the old doctrine of just war was about. This means that the effectiveness of U.S. power depends not just on force but also largely on the authority of the United States, of which legitimacy is a major component. In a militarily unipolar world, the dominant power, to be legitimate, has to be limited, contained, and authorized by an authority which may be debatable but widely accepted. The UN—preferably a reformed UN—is the natural institution to serve that role; but when it is paralyzed, there are other institutions that can provide legitimacy and constraint.

In a world in which the barrier between domestic and foreign affairs is increasingly porous, legitimacy covers many aspects of internal behavior beyond the use of force. How a government treats its citizens, or its foreigners, or its prisoners, is a substantial part of what provides or deprives it of the legitimacy it needs and of the respect that others grant or deny it. In global affairs, there are many aspects of globalization that require international institutions capable of monitoring, regulating, promoting and censoring what the actors do. Building such institutions is a way of consolidating and expanding international legitimacy and of serving the interests of the actors and of those who are acted upon. This is why a blind or blanket contempt for international law and organizations is shortsighted and regressive.

The fundamental choice today is therefore clear. Either the United States will accept that military dominance is to be asserted in a framework of universal norms, reciprocal agreements and institutions, however imperfect, so as to be able to fight common battles and to diminish resistance to American leadership, or else the latter will take the form of an empire founded on military force that seeks its legitimacy in a very unconvincing discourse of universal liberation. That discourse and the use of force—preaching and the stick—do not go well together.

In the long run, I believe Americans will return to the policy of cooperation that had been so successful after 1945 and that they will understand that imperial America is neither desirable nor possible. In the first instance, this is because the problems that they face, including the fight against terrorism, or nuclear proliferation, or the misery of the greatest part of the third world all require multilateral action. Even putting that aside, it is also because the will to be an empire is

not very compatible with America's public mood, or with the present international system, as the collapse of the Soviet empire and the earlier demise of the colonial empires have shown. Today, commanding an empire requires patience, expertise and a willingness to spend gigantic resources which one does not find in a nation that is still deeply marked by its anti-colonial origins and its concentration on domestic problems. No one knows how long it will take, but the moment will come when the American people will understand that the values of which they are proud are incompatible with the unrestrained use of force and that the embrace of unilateralism and preventive war can all too easily inspire other countries (such as Russia) to help turn the world into a jungle.

I did not always agreed with Aron's readings of the policies of the states that shaped the post-war world. But I think that my emphasis on restrained force and necessary legitimacy is a lesson I have learned both from events and from my great master and friend.