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## THE WAYS OF AMERICAN UNILATERALISM: CORE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT<sup>1</sup>

Jana Tůmová\*

### Abstract

The study explores the roots and the specifics of the American unilateralism. It also focuses on the essence of the American unilateralism during the Cold War and indicates the changes that the system has undergone in the post-Cold War era. By analyzing the development of the concept it proves that the hints of American unilateralism can to be observed since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The concrete observations of the American unilateralism were carried out in the case study with the focus on the US voting patterns in the UN Security Council from 1945 with the simultaneous applications of the public goods theory. This case study proves that the American unilateralism is the present pattern of the American international politics making for (at least) more than 50 years.

**Key words:** unilateralism, USA, UN, Security Council resolutions, veto, security, public goods

Since the beginning of the 1990s the International Relations scholars have gradually increased their interest in the American unilateralism. There have been many publications printed on the subject (Prestowitz, 2003; Fabrini, 2006; Halper – Clarke, 2004); political scientists as well as the International Relations scientists try to estimate the impacts of the American unilateralism on the functions and development of the international relations' system. The research in this area is well justified. Since the 1990s the USA are the sole superpower in the international relations and through this position influence significantly the shape of the system of international relations, as well as the development of the relations among other international relations' actors.

The upsurge in focus on the American unilateralism is connected with the presidential era of **George W. Bush Jr.** mainly because of his international politics connected with the war in Iraq. Under the previous president **Bill**

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**Clinton** and the current president **Barack Obama** the scholars focus more on other problems, quite coincidentally in both of these cases to economic problems, which the USA have in these periods mainly to cope with.<sup>2</sup> Despite these fluctuations the USA are since the 1990s consider the country with the unilateralist approach to international problems solving and decision making and are, accordingly, thus perceived by most of the scholars and in most of the publications. (Prestowitz, 2003; Fabrini, 2006; Halper – Clarke, 2004; etc.) However, some questions concerning the American unilateralism remain unanswered. Is the American unilateralism really the phenomenon of last circa 20 years? Where are the roots of the American unilateralism? How has the Cold War influenced the development of the American unilateralism? In this paper, I will try to answer these and interconnected questions.

To fully understand the concept of unilateralism requires, in primis, to define it somehow. Unilateralism as the general concept can be perceived in several ways. The most common viewpoints to study of unilateralism are International Relations' theories, economic theories, International Security theories as well as International Law or cultural theories. For the purposes of this paper, the unilateralism will be perceived from the viewpoint of the theories of International Relations. How to define the unilateralism from this viewpoint? Unilateralism can be defined as the „*tendency to opt out from the multilateral framework (whether existing or proposed) or to act alone in addressing a particular global or regional challenge rather than choosing to participate in collective action.*” (Malone – Kong, 2003, p. 3) To define its counterpart, multilateralism can be perceived as the international cooperation with the aim to solve existing or emerging problems (Ruggie, 1992). Using the definition of the multilateralism, the degree of unilateralism can be judged by the “*tendencies to opt out from the multilateral framework.*” (Malone – Kong, 2003, p. 3)

Unilateral approach to decision making does not obviously exist only per se, on the contrary, the state aims at certain goals. In most cases, these goals are to protect existing or emerging state interests. State interests can be also

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<sup>2</sup> It is quite interesting coincidence that both **Bill Clinton** and **Barack Obama** have had to cope with the severe economic downturns of the American economy. Because of this fact Clinton's administration did not set any fixed goals in the area of the international relations and was thus criticized because of lack of conception in this area. Similarly the Obama's administration focuses mainly on the economic reforms, which in turn significantly cuts the funds for the international military and non-military operations. These attitudes of both of these presidents are sometimes ill-interpreted as the decrease of the American unilateralism.

defined in various ways – from the viewpoint of state defense, economy, international relations, international trade etc. For the purpose of this paper, the national interest will be perceived as the mix of economic, political and security interests of the state. State interests are usually defined by the government of the state. Due to many aspects affecting the national interests, it is obvious that the state interests will be changing in the long run because of changes in economy, state defense capabilities, state's international politics and all other above mentioned areas (viewpoints). The inner “strength”, respectively the inner coherence of the state is also of interest. The more the state is coherent and the influence of the lobby or cultural groups smaller, the easier it will be to proclaim cohesive and well defined national interest (Krasner, 1978, p. 56)<sup>3</sup>.

Because of the different conditions that shaped the international system during the Cold War and in the post-Cold War era, as well as different influences that shaped the American unilateralism, the paper consists of several chapters. In the first two chapters the paper will focus on the political and ideological roots of the American unilateralism and on the economic and security roots of this phenomenon; next chapters will focus on the American unilateralism during the Cold War. At the end of the paper there will also be short chapter exploring the influences affecting the American unilateralism in the post-Cold War era.

## **Political and ideological roots of the American unilateralism**

In 1993 the International Security Journal published the paper entitled The Unipolar Illusion. Author of the paper reconsiders the unipolar system after the end of the Cold War. Using the Waltz's Neorealist approach the author supposes that the situation in the international system at the end of the Cold War is only temporary – that the USA find themselves in the unique unilateral moment, which should be fully utilized (including the use of unilateral approach to shape the international relations) as it will not last for long. The author also predicts the new superpowers to emerge (and to disable the American unilateral approach up to 2010). His findings proved to be correct to a certain degree; however, the American unilateralism seems to be here to stay.

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<sup>3</sup> From this viewpoint, the unilateralism in the USA is quite unique. The USA have never had a great degree of inner coherence and thus to approve the international interests was always a matter of consensus, which was easy to achieve only under certain circumstances. For further details see Layne, 1993, p. 5-51.

The American unilateralism, however, existed much earlier than at the verge of the post-Cold War era. There were certain factors that made the USA more vulnerable to the formation of this approach. The first factor proved to be the relatively isolated (both geographically and politically) position of the USA when compared to other states. Geographic isolation provided the USA with the unique possibility to set its unilateral policy on the whole North American continent (after the proclamation of the American independence and the actual birth of the USA) without any major threats or limits posed by other great powers of that time.<sup>4</sup> USA were thus in this period free of the European policy concept of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – that is the balance of power policy.<sup>5</sup> Because of this geographic isolation the American unilaterally set policy did not pose a direct threat to power objectives of other states. The USA in this period are thus not forced to engage in international interaction via various alliances in order to achieve their goals.<sup>6</sup> This situation, however, cannot be considered isolationism, as it is sometimes interpreted (Powaski, 1991). For isolationism the following features are typical: state isolates itself from other states – both in the physical sense (clear setting of the state's boundaries) and political, ideological or cultural sense. The USA, however, at no point in their history adopted this approach. On the contrary, they were the melting pot of European and other nationalities, cultures and political traditions.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, during the entire 19<sup>th</sup> Century expansionism embedded in the Manifest Destiny (quest for western territories of the North America) is to be observed, clearly contradicting the idea

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<sup>4</sup> The main exceptions from the above noted rule were the restraints from the North - the UK (Canada) and Russia (Alaska). However, as soon as the USA have learnt that Canada does not want to proclaim independence and to join the USA, the USA kept status quo in its policy towards Canada and did not try to intimidate the UK rule. The problem with Russia was solved in 1867 by the American purchase of Alaska.

<sup>5</sup> While the European states in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century ensure their security and territorial gains through rather complicated system of alliances and mutually binding and multilateral treaties (which may be considered the roots of the multilateral system common in later periods), which moreover does not automatically ensure that the state is secure from the claims from other states (see Kissinger, 1999, p. 77-102), the USA continue to expand westwards in the framework of the North American continent and face the economic growth due to rich deposits of raw materials and societal order without any major obstacles (if we do not consider the resistance of Native Americans, which was generally not difficult to defy).

<sup>6</sup> This was also one of the results of the strategic foreign policy of the USA, which primarily focused on the American continent. This is clearly to be observed e.g. in the Monroe Doctrine.

<sup>7</sup> The politic foundations of the United States are mainly based on liberal (**Kant**) and conservative (**Burke**) thoughts, that is on the thoughts of European thinkers.

of isolationism. Monroe Doctrine - the key document setting the international politics of the USA in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century can be also considered unilateral policy document. The USA through this proclamation set their area of interest in which to develop their ideals and goals. These tendencies were clearly to be observed during American-Spanish war of 1898. The USA started the military operation on Cuba which was at that time oppressed by the Spanish rule. The main aim of the USA was to free Cuba and the other oppressed Caribbean isles from the Spanish rule and to promote development of this area. These actions of the USA can be also perceived as the illustration of the Monroe Doctrine in practice.

Further circumstances that influenced the development of the American unilateralism were the conditions at the birth and at the very beginning of the existence of the USA as an independent state.<sup>8</sup> Because of the fact that the USA emerged as a relatively democratic (or rather republican) reaction to the monarchist regimes common at that time in continental Europe, their origin was surrounded by the glory of justice and victory. Because of that certain exceptionalism emerged, which is in various forms to be observed until today<sup>9</sup>. Because of the creeds the American society rests upon<sup>10</sup>, and also due to the fact that in that period there was no other competitive democratic societal model, which would have the results similar to the USA, the USA or their representatives considered their approach to be ideal and, what is even more crucial, to be generally applicable in every other society. This approach is to be observed not only in the attitudes of the USA, but also in the proclamations of their representatives; for example **Thomas Jefferson** who proclaimed that *“the American model will spread everywhere, to some parts earlier, to some later, but ultimately everywhere”*; **Benjamin Franklin**: *“The cause of all mankind”*, or

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<sup>8</sup> Typical document illustrating the existence of the unilateralism at that time is, for instance, the Washington Farewell Address, where **George Washington** warns against international alliances (see American historical documents 1000-1904), or the republican visions of **Thomas Jefferson** (see Kaplan, 1987)

<sup>9</sup> This phenomenon was clearly articulated by the Israeli ambassador who claimed that :“ *The theory [of the American exceptionalism] is rooted in the presumptions that the USA have the anti-imperialist history*” (see Malone, 2003, p. 24)

<sup>10</sup> The cornerstone the American society is built upon comprises mainly the set of liberal values typical for the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Liberalism (so called classical liberalism). This type of Liberalism presumes that human being is entitled to various rights, mainly equal treatment in law and the right to own property. These rights resulted in the market environment, which embodies all of these rights that contributed to its origin. With a certain exaggeration it is possible to assert that the USA consider the spread of the free markets as helping to spread the personal freedoms as well.

**Woodrow Wilson:** *“American principles, American policies were also the principles and policies of forward looking men and women everywhere, of every modern nation, of every enlighten community. They are the principles of mankind and must prevail.”* (Porter, 2006, p. 102) Using unilateralism when spreading these values can be thus considered as aiming to spread values, which USA deem universal and beneficial and which in the USA have led to the flourishing civilization.

The conditions at the beginning of the existence of the USA as an independent state influenced the development of the American unilateralism also in other ways. One of them was the traditional ambivalent approach of the USA to international treaties. The representatives of the USA during the War of Independence clearly found out that the international treaties are not always to be adhered to and their conditions fulfilled (here, it was the case of treaties with the United Kingdom. The entire War of Independence could be in this light interpreted as the endeavor of the colonies to push forward their “national” interests which had during the previous century crystallized in that area. The USA having thus already had this experience have strongly reacted to the American commitments which rooted in or corresponded with the American national interest; on the other hand the USA have not had very willingly participated in new international treaties which could later lead to some restrictions to those national interests. (Krish, 2003) Typical example of such a behavior can be considered the decline of support for the US membership in the International Court of Justice (states have to follow the decisions of the main decision making body), non ratification of several UN treaties on human rights, non-ratification of Kyoto protocol etc.

Other important factor which supported the development of the American unilateralism was the strong emphasis on the national sovereignty and certain mistrust to centralized decision making bodies<sup>11</sup>. One of the national sovereignty emphasis expressions seems to be exactly the preference of the national interests in comparison to the interests of multilateral organizations. From this point of view the multilateral organizations represent only a certain plenary sessions, where the USA define and put their national interests in practice. (Malone – Khong, 2003, p. 21) This lastly mention factor was quite

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<sup>11</sup> This negative attitude clearly showed itself in the **Jefferson’s** republican creed, in which he (among other recommendations) pleads to control the Federal Government (as he was afraid of loss of the state competencies and their shift towards the federal level). See Kaplan, 1987.

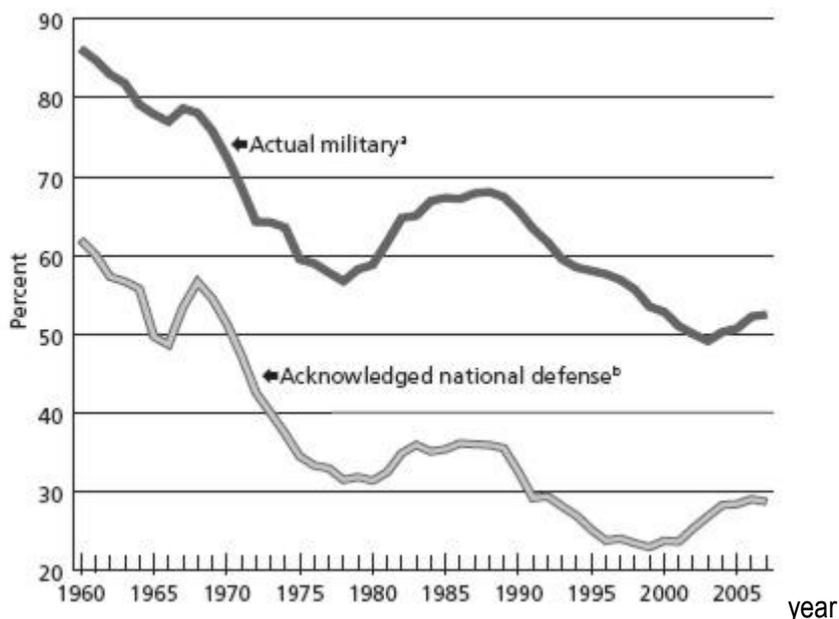
easily to be observed at the end of the Second World War.

## **Economic and security roots of American unilateralism**

Another factor that advanced the development of American unilateralism was the economic potential of the country and the economic theories influencing the USA. Because of the American economic output that in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century boosted to the world top (measured in GDP) the USA have had (when compared to other states) much more possibilities to invest and develop those industries which considerably helped the USA and enabled them to promote the American national interests unilaterally. The investments were made especially in the military area and in the technological development.

Even before the beginning of the Second World War (and much more in its course) some of the mightiest representatives of industrial concerns (e.g. General Electrics) have lobbied for the connections with government, respectively for the continuous inflow of governmental contracts, which should primarily focus on military technological development and research. It was a de facto proposal for the permanent military economy, or more precisely for the creation of military-industrial complexes subsidized by the government (Foster – Holleman – McChesney, 2008). In the following graph (Graph no. 1 – Real versus confessed investments in arms industry as the percentage of federal expenses) it is obvious that by the end of the Second World War and even later (when the arms industry expenses should normally decrease) there is rather high percentage of federal expenses flowing in this area.

**Graph no. 1** Real versus confessed investments in arms industry as the percentage of federal expenses



Source: Foster – Holleman – McChesney, 2008

When compared to the military expenditures of other states, the USA have been in 50's on the top. The country was thus ensured the security and was free of the necessity to entangle in international alliances in order to increase its security or to secure its national interests.

The economic development of the country has also to a great degree enabled to form the international economic system in accord with the American interests and ideals. Until the end of the First World War, the leading position in the international economy was occupied by the United Kingdom. This assertion is mainly supported by the international trade figures (trade volumes accomplished in British Pounds) as well as by the fact that London was the leading financial centre at that time and the United Kingdom was the net borrower worldwide. The international economic system was based on the premises of Classical Liberalism, which coincidentally was also convenient for the USA. As the USA have had similar foundations of its economy the nature of the

international economic system also has helped to development and growth of American trade and American economy as such. At the end of the First World War, however, there occurs the rift and the downfall of this system (represented by the end of the Gold Standard). Consequently, several monetary blocs occur (one of them was the Dollar bloc). This was the moment when the USA because of their inner market size (and because of the gradual disintegration of the British Commonwealth) started to gain their leading role in the international economic system. (Gilpin, 1987)<sup>12</sup>

The USA thus gradually became the cornerstone of the modern (post-war era) international economic system. The USA as the main actor, i.e. hegemon, had the capability to set the needed conditions for running the system and also the capabilities to enforce them.<sup>13</sup> The creation of such a system embodies however also the costs – e.g. protecting the stable economic environment, solving problems concerning the currency convertibility etc. Liberal market environment can be thus (with certain modifications) considered public good, the costs of which are mainly born by the hegemon or the central player in this environment. Other participating states should also contribute (measured by the amount of their participation in the system) to running this system, main costs as well as the responsibility for running the environment are however born by the hegemon. (Gilpin, 1987, p. 76-77) This situation enables the hegemon to enforce its unilateral interests. From the functional point of view, it is even crucial that the hegemon pursues its interest and keeps its central role (which is threatened by the increasing costs to maintain the stability of the system and

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<sup>12</sup> The USA's role in the system which they took over from the United Kingdom represents the structural connection of liberal market environment and the system stability. From this point of view the USA represent the guarantor of the security in the system. This role is anchored in the liberal theories (e.g. Adam Smith) which assert that the development of free trade and markets in the stable economic environment (which can be provided by hegemon) directly leads to decreasing frictions in the international relations and the growth of security within the system. On the other hand, the protectionism (and absence of the "stabilizer") leads to increased frictions among the system participants and eventually to wars (which is well documented by the development in the 1930s – that is the fall of Gold bullion standard and growth of nationalism). These attitudes were reflected in the US plans on post-Second World War reconstruction.

<sup>13</sup> These attitudes are reflected in the Charles Kindleberger's theories of hegemonic stability which asserts that the role of the leading power (hegemon) is crucial to functioning of the system. The stronger is the hegemon, the more stable is the international economic system. This is only the case of liberal market economies, no other types. See (Gilpin 1987: 72 – 80.)

the increasing number of free riders<sup>14</sup>). As in the systems, shifts from center to periphery occur periodically and when the hegemon does not accommodate the current conditions in the economic area and also does not exercise its potential to keep the system stable, the system dismantles (Gilpin, 1987, p. 78). This, naturally, has negative consequences for other states that participate in the system.

## **The development of the American unilateralism after the end of the World War Two**

The Second World War and the consequent rise of bipolar system have constituted significant shift in the international system architecture. The changes, however, occurred even earlier. As Robert Gilpin has noted *“Because the nature of the international financial system influences the states’ national interests, states try to influence the nature of the system so that it could serve their national interests”*. (Gilpin, 1987, p. 119) This assertion offers rather controversial view on the post-war reconstruction of the international system. The assertion was, however, in many cases historically confirmed. The notoriously mentioned example is the United Kingdom during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The UK in this époque had similar position in the international system as the USA; the Gold Standard together with the dominance of the British Pound and the spread of Classical Liberalism led to unique growth of all countries that participated in this system (measured by GDP growth). Post-Second World War reconstruction aimed to achieve the similar goal only with the exception of leading currency, where the British Pound was replaced by the American Dollar. As soon as that occurred, the American hegemony in economic area was also confirmed.

The Robert Gilpin’s thoughts on the influence of the hegemon on the nature of the economic system have their parallel even in the non-economic sphere. The reconstruction of the international economic system has indeed proved to be similar to the international relations system reconstruction. The situation in the latter system is, however, a little bit more complicated. When reconstructing the economic system it is sufficient that the system is viable and ensures the economic stability and development to the participants in the system. When reconstructing the international relations system, even if the

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<sup>14</sup> Free riders are the actors within the system who participate on the system’s benefits without contributing to help to cover the running costs of the system.

strongest state or the hegemon has enough power to shape the system, the final shape of the system has always have to be accepted and supported by other participants in the system. (Nye, 2002, p. 41-76) This fact is well apprehended and was even officially confirmed by the press proclamation of president's **Bush** advisory, who stated that *"because you are the world leader, you must make people believe that it is in their own interest to follow you. If everybody hates you, it is difficult to be a world leader."* (Scowfort, 2003, p. 293)

One of the ways how to avoid these situations (*"everybody hates you"*) is to form the international system in such a way that is naturally supported by all other (all at least majority of) participants in the system. This may be achieved by constituting various international bodies, where however, the hegemon still maintains its leading role. This was exactly the case of the USA when reconstructing the international system after the end of the Second World War – the echoes of the above mentioned principle is to be observed in the very architecture of the international system and international organizations that helped to form the international system (as the UN, IMF and GATT – later WTO). The USA, despite entering and organizing the international participation in these bodies, however, kept the leading role and its decision making powers (in order to promote national interests), as it may be observed e.g. on the American voting patterns in the UN.<sup>15</sup>

## American unilateralism and the UN

The UN may be the typical example on which to demonstrate the above mentioned tactics and the principles of system reconstruction after the Second World War. The UN is today considered the multinational and multilateral plenum, which was not exactly the case when it was established and even little later on. The collocation "United Nations" was used for the first time in 1942 by **F. D. Roosevelt** and described the USA and their Second World War allies (OSN, 2000). The basis of the new organization which should have helped to create the new international environment (the UN) was intended to be based on this very alliance. Concept of this organization which was preferred by **Roosevelt** during the Second World War was based on the idea of the so called four policemen. Within this conceptual framework it was expected that four

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<sup>15</sup> Because of this paper's thematic orientation the text mainly focuses on the UN and its institutions, the American unilateralists approach, however, is to be observed in the construction of other international bodies – as the IMF or WTO – as well.

spheres of influence would be established, supervised respectively by the USA, China, the USSR and the United Kingdom. This concept was based on the traditional concept of Realpolitik and was the consequence of **Roosevelt's** (and generally all Americans of that time) deeply rooted distrust towards the liberal international institutions of the Wilsonian kind.

That this organization was not considered typical liberal international body was moreover confirmed by the behavior of other founding fathers of the UN. All of them tried somehow to promote national interests through this body - **Churchill**, who considered the UN to be only a framework organization and who pleaded to focus more on regional cooperation, or **Stalin**, who considered the UN only the international organization for settling disputes (in security area) and who absolutely did not want to grant the UN international authority in economic or societal issues. (Etinger, 2001) Because of the factual American superiority in the international system at that time the American view of the UN has prevailed – including the modified four policemen UN shape, which was embodied in the UN Security Council.

The UN Security Council was also considered a means by which the victorious Second World War alliance or its individual members could promote their national interests on the multilateral platform.<sup>16</sup> The concept of the Security Council granted its members the possibility to significantly shape the UN policy and decision making by using veto vote.<sup>17</sup> Veto was thus considered the significant tool to promote the national interests on the UN platform. The resolutions that hindered or contradicted the national interests could be simply vetoed by the permanent Security Council members and, consequently, the state could act unilaterally without any restrictions (as the state could veto other resolution criticizing its decision as well). According to the national interests priorities certain decision making patterns in the Security Council could be traced and arranged as shown in the table below (Table no. 1).

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<sup>16</sup> In some cases (as the Iraq war in 2003), if the interests are deemed to be vital the USA may in some cases choose to draw back from the international platform and to act unilaterally. Because of the legitimacy issues most of the actions, however, are brought on the international platform. That does not however mean that the USA cannot in that case act unilaterally - they only choose the international legal framework for their action.

<sup>17</sup> The USA belongs together with China, Russia, France and the UK to 5 countries which are the permanent UN Security Council members and who can veto the UN resolutions.

**Table no. 1**

The articulation of unilateralism	National's interest importance
Veto	High
Disapproval	Medium
Abstention from vote	Low

Source: author's own division

Further in the text will focus exclusively on the use of veto as the strongest tool to promote national interests on multilateral platform. Focusing on the voting patterns of the USA and their Security Council Western allies (UK and France)<sup>18</sup> certain voting trend to be analyzed appears. As the UN have published statistics on the veto employment by the individual Security Council members it is easy to follow the frequency and the topics where the veto was mostly employed. Because of the extensive timeframe of the document (1946 to 2004) it seems to be possible to identify the trend in the patterns of its employment.

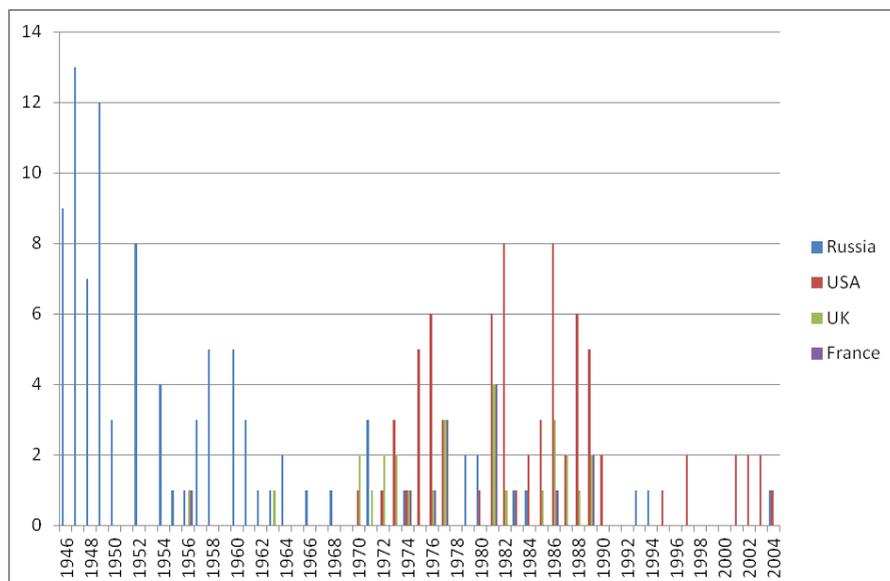
As it is to be observed in Graph no. 2, the Security Council members (graph states only the USA, USSR, France and the UK data) really sought to promote their national interests at the beginning of the 1950s. The most striking evidence of this approach is the vetoes employed by the USSR in the first decade of UN's existence. This timeframe roughly corresponds with the post-World War Two **Stalin's** era in the USSR. **Stalin** was strongly opposed to the idea of further enlargement of the UN as he considered the UN a means of promoting capitalistic international system (which was exactly the American perception of UN), thus hindering the spread of socialism (competing international order). In order to slow down this development **Stalin**, more precisely the USSR Security Council representatives, vetoed 23 UN accession applications (between 1946 and 1949). On the other hand, the USA in the first two decades of the UN existence did not veto any resolution, as well as the UK or France. This trend was broken in 1970s when the increase in vetoes employed by the USA and the UK or France started to appear. It is obvious (see

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<sup>18</sup> These two Security Council members were chosen based on their similar involvement and because of their drawing benefits from the international system set by the USA (opposed to USSR and China).

Graph no. 2) that some vetoes were employed as a common decision of the USA and the UK and France, there is, however, stringing increase in the American vetoes which the European allies did not support. What was the reason for such a development?

**Graph no. 2** Veto graph – individual states and years



Source: own interpretation based on UN data

## The Cold War – the American unilateralism as a toll for the international security

The main factor that caused the above mentioned rather striking veto development was represented by different international system setting's perceptions by individual states by the end of the Second World War and thereafter. The post-war military alliances between these states were also of great importance.

After the Second World War ended the international system architecture and the states' interactions were strikingly simple. While the USSR (especially in economic and political area) did not approve of the new international system's

architecture, other US allies (UK, France) concurred in it and what was even more important this system in fact reflected their inner values (liberal values aimed at promoting the international trade etc.).<sup>19</sup> The situation to a great extent fulfilled the Ch. Kindleberger's stipulations concerning the hegemonic stability theory. There was one hegemon (USA) which provided (in the capitalistic part of the world) stability of this international liberal-capitalistic system.<sup>20</sup> The USA profited from the followings factors: first, cultural and economic (in sense of the economic system and national values system construction) similarity of the USA, UK and France, the other was the American overwhelming military capabilities and thus possibilities to protect their allies during the emerging Cold War (this military help was institutionalized in form of the NATO). To understand the first factor, a detailed study on the national values and identities and their changes needs to be carried out; this paper, however, focuses on the second factor, which also helped promoting American unilateralism.

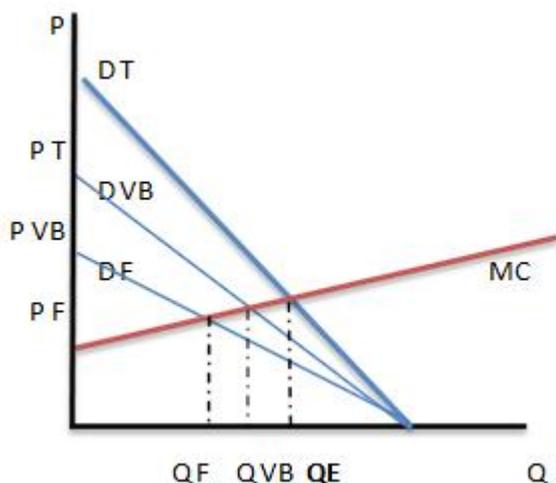
The support of the American national interests from the viewpoint of the above mentioned second factor demonstrated itself in several ways. The American allies did not either put forward the resolutions that contradicted the American national interests or, if such a resolution occurred they vetoed it; they also accepted the international system settings in vigor back then. The reasons for such a behavior are described in Graph no. 3, which shows the economic concept of public good. Public good concept shows the situation where there is a certain good (non-rival and non-excludable) available to general public (and its costs are covered by public as well – collected through taxes etc.). However, each consumer of this good has certain individually set thresholds which indicate how much he is actually willing to pay for this good, if he could freely decide. By comparing these thresholds to actual costs of production (costs to produce this good), the economists can decide what the optimal output for this good should be. National defense is a typical example of such a good.

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<sup>19</sup> See Campbell, 1961 or Ruggie, 1998 for further details on identities and their impact on the international relations

<sup>20</sup> Other participants of the system accept the hegemonic nature of the international system, the hegemon on the other hand ensures the stability of such a system

**Graph no. 3** Graphical projection of security as a public good



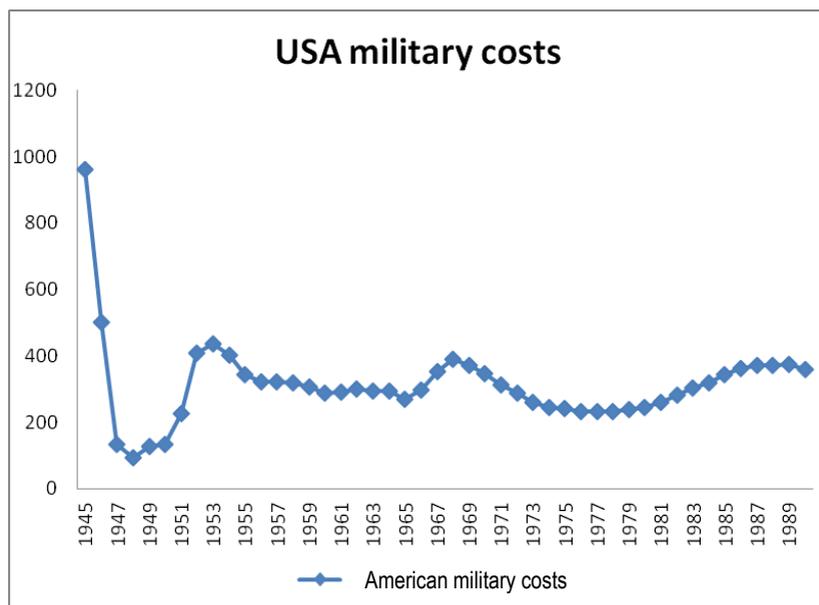
Source: author's interpretation

The above given graph shows the mutual relations between the demand for the security (perceived as public good) provided by the USA for states with similar perceptions of the international order as the USA – that is for France /D F/ and the United Kingdom /D VB/ – both of them being the Security Council members). The total demand DT shows the total demand for security; QE amount shown on the X axes represents the equilibrium in quantity of demanded good (equilibrium is constructed as intersection of marginal costs MC and total demand TD). This graphical illustration de facto shows the clash between the individual security needs of both states and marginal costs, which the state is ready to sacrifice for purchase of this good (security). Sacrifice is in this sense understood both as the financial contribution to production of this good as well as subordination and coordination of both states' national interests to the US ones. Because of the theoretical concept of the public good – namely because of the presumption that the price is not dependent on the amount consumed – the amount of the public good depends solely on the demand of the individual actors (here the UK and France). The situation illustrated in the graph, however, is not stable and changes based on the changes in the international system. Following these systemic changes, the scope of the D VB

and D F as well as MC scope is changing, which reflects the changing demand for security as well as price which the states are ready to pay for it.

To understand the development of security demand as well as to understand the real costs needed to provide this public good it is important to look first at the American military costs and their development during the course of the Cold War (graph no 4).

**Graph no. 4** US military costs in billion USD



Source: own interpretation based on Calhoun 1996 data

From the graph above we can assess the total costs of producing the public good “security” (if we are supposing that, in accord with the hegemony stability theory, the USA born most of the costs). During the 1950s and the 1960s the US military costs amounted to approximately 300 billion USD (with the exception of the Korean war at the beginning of 1950s and the Vietnam war at the end of 1960s and the beginning of 1970s), there can be observed certain reduction in military cost in 1970s in the détente era with the cost fluctuating around 260 billion dollars and subsequent growth to 320 billion dollars in the

1980s.

Some of these funds were used in the US military operations and to promotion of national security; great part of them, however, has been spent in order to keep the international security – which comprised the development of new technologies and the funds which the USA contributed to NATO budgets in order to provide for their European allies security (and system stability in that area).

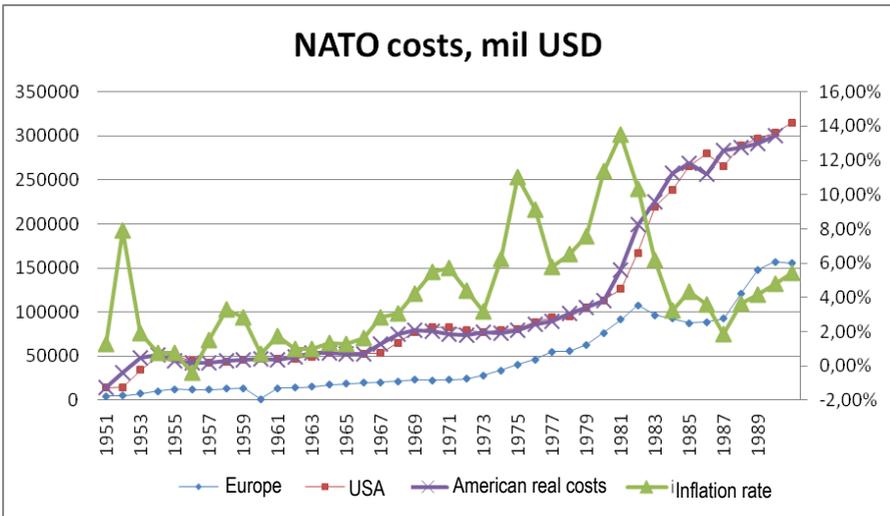
NATO as the organization contributed to the increased security of the European allies by the means of NATO's treaty article that obliged the NATO members to help every member state that would be attacked (this help, although it was not clearly stated in the article, was usually interpreted as the military help, which was financed from the national military budgets of individual NATO members) (US General accounting office, 1998),<sup>1</sup> and also by the fact that the member states were obliged to contribute on an annual basis to the common NATO budget, which was intended to cover the costs of joint military exercises and connected logistics actions etc.

In the graph shown below the individual NATO members military costs are outlined (summed up for European NATO members and individually for the USA). As the UK and France contributed the greatest amounts to NATO budgets (from European members) and as their percentage of contributions to other members contributions remains more or less stable in time, it is possible (with certain expected misreading) to compare the development of the European NATO member's costs to American costs as it was the development of the French and British costs to American costs.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 5 of the North-Atlantic Treaty only asserts that when a member state is under attack other states would act as if the attack is directed against them as well (therefore, recourse to diplomatic or other measures short of military force is plausible to expect). For more information see The North-Atlantic Treaty, available at <http://www.nato.int>.

Graph no. 5 Contributions to NATO in mil USD



Source: own chart based on NATO data (NATO 2011)

During 1950s and 1960s there is a correlation between the military costs of the European states and the US costs (see Graph no. 5). This development corresponds with the reactions of states to perceived or real security dangers, as can be discerned from the equation below:

$$ME_R = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}PRICE_R + \beta_{12}INCOME_R + \beta_{13}SPILLINS_{t-1} + \beta_{14}THREATS_{t-1} - \beta_{15}STRATEGY_R + \epsilon_R$$

Source: Eloranta, 2010

This equation developed by the economists specializing in the military costs systematization (especially Sandler and Hartley); (Eloranta, 2010), clearly shows the impact of the strategy and the military threats perception on the total military costs. ME stands for the total military costs; Price for the price of the bought military material; Income for the GDP of the country; Spillings for the effect of alliances; Threats for the security threats and Strategy for the strategy that the state has chosen. If the security is perceived as a public good, it is

more appropriate to lower the total costs of the alliances effect – if the state is in an alliance, the military costs are lower (as the security costs are born by the co-partner, too.) This can be intensified by the Black passenger problem, which can lead to the situation that the state gradually lowers its security costs and these are then born mainly by the coalition partner, the total security provided to this black passenger, however, remains the same.

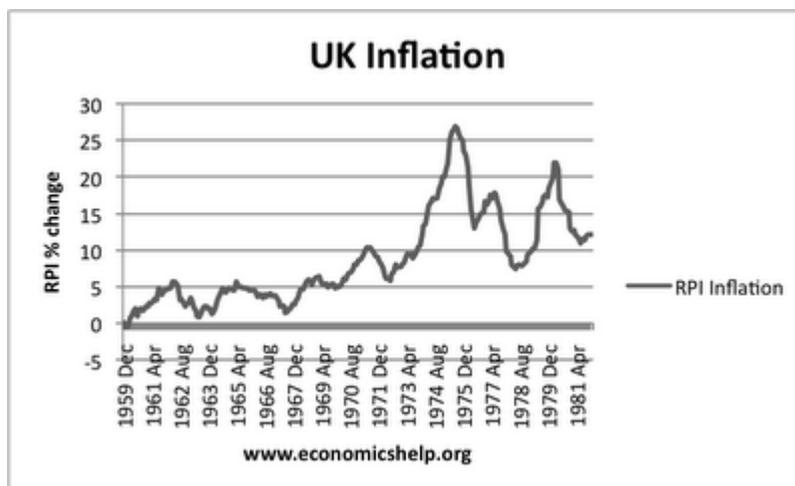
As stated above, in the 1950s and the 1960s there were no signs of such a behavior. The European states contributed in accord with their financial situation to common NATO security budget as well as to their own national defense systems, which also supported the common security of NATO members. Because of the correlation between the European and the American costs it is obvious that both the European states and the USA comprehended the international situation similarly and there are thus no signs of black passenger to be observed. These attitudes are also reflected in the British and French UN Security Council patterns. (See Graph no. 2)<sup>2</sup>

From further development of the European and American attitudes it is obvious that in Europe in the era of détente (1970s) the subjective perception of threats (Threats) decreased, which in turn lead to the sinking military costs. The problem of the black passenger became also more obvious (sinking military contribution to NATO budget are partly caused by the black passenger problem and partly are due to the decreasing GDP of European NATO members – states were hit by stagflation resulting from oil price crisis). Trend of this decrease is in the graph not so obvious because the European contributions were given in nominal, not in real GDP values. The inflation in 1970s, however, exceeded 20% in many states in Europe (for illustration, see Graph no. 6).

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<sup>2</sup> The exception from this rule was the Suez crisis that directly affected the British and French economic and political situation

**Graph no. 6** Illustrative development of British inflation



Source: Economics help 2010

In the 1980s the gap between US military expenditures and the expenditures of the European states widened. Although quite objectively the Cold War was in one of its tougher phases, the European states significantly lost their incentives to increase the investments in their military programs as well as to NATO budget (which only well approves the black passenger effect) due to the existence of American security umbrella.<sup>3</sup> As the European states in that period focused more on their common European Communities project and on their economic development the total marginal costs (MC) which the states were ready to sacrifice for the defense were continually diminishing. This departure from the security issues lead paradoxically also to decrease in the support for the American national interests and unilateral policies because the threats were not perceived as vital and the cooperation with the USA in the security area did not seem to be a must. (During the Cold War the Realist approach to the International Relations dominated so the security issues were considered as the top agenda of the national interest; guaranteeing national

<sup>3</sup> As the American strategic policy considered the West Europe crucial dam for communism spread, the USA thus had to provide military assistance to West European states despite their low financial involvement in the common security scheme

security from this viewpoint equaled securing existence of the state.) These changing attitudes contributed to the increase in UN resolutions that contradicted the US national interests and that the USA had to veto. Because of the fact that these resolutions are not mostly proposed by the American allies (here focusing only on the UK and France – some Third world countries that were traditionally perceived US allies proposed some of these resolutions), the shift is not so dramatic. More striking is the evidence of the rising the number of US vetoes that are not supported by these allies in the Security Council by applying their vetoes as well.<sup>4</sup>

## **Short overview of the changing perceptions of the American unilateralism after the end of the Cold War**

After the end of the Cold War the above mentioned trends have strengthened. The main factor that influenced the development in this direction was the fact that the unifying element in form of the American security umbrella seemed to lose its vital significance. Most of the international system's actors (states) thought that this was the moment to strengthen the multilateral tendencies and in fact to create new international system by applying more equal approach to individual actors (especially states). The multilateral platform for these tendencies should be represented by the UN in the political area or the GATT (WTO), respectively IMF and World Bank Group in economic area. These expectations were automatically accompanied by the expectation that the USA would to a certain degree abandon their position of world hegemon (which they have gained by the disintegration of the USSR).

These expectations were reflected both in the theories of International Relations arguing in favor of the rise of new great powers (Jackson-Howe 2008) or pointing to the diminishing role and power of the USA in international relations (Nye 2002), as well as in practice (in form of the pressure on the USA on the international platform to decrease their hegemonic power). Typical case of the latter behavior is the UN conventions which the USA have had to veto or have not ratified in order to keep their central position in the international relations' system. The most notorious examples can be Kyoto protocol, International Court of Justice, human rights' conventions and landmine ban

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<sup>4</sup> By applying the veto one state can stop the UN resolution from being passed, the co-vetoes are, however, perceived a psychological tool and the USA seek these co-vetoes exactly because of that effect - to avoid the accusation of unilateral actions.

treaty (Anti-Personnel Landmines Convention). All these treaties in some sense endanger the USA as they give the competitive advantage to all of the states that have not signed them (in many cases, China figures on the list of UN members who have not ratified the treaties). The most striking evidence of that attitude is the Kyoto protocol. China (and many developing countries as well) denied to ratify Kyoto protocol pointing out to the fact that the developed states were also not hindered in their economic growth by ecologic concerns during the Industrial Revolution. If the USA in such a situation ratified the protocol, it would have had serious impacts on the economic competitiveness of the American goods on the global markets and thus the position of the USA as the guarantor of the international economic system would be threatened.

The USA has had different vision of the post-Cold War era international system. If reflecting the Kindleberger's theory of hegemonic stability, the USA (despite diminishing security threats<sup>5</sup>) has had to keep their central position in the international system because of ensuring the economic stability of the system. This was, however, more difficult to achieve as the support for the American actions was waning even from the traditional American allies (Great Britain or France<sup>6</sup>). Moreover, growth of non-European countries which were by the end of the Second World War on the economic periphery but gradually made their way to economic powers (China, India, Brazil etc.) was to be observed. These states, however, have different approach and visions of the international system's order in comparison to the visions of the USA or the currently existing system. The American representatives are well aware of these frictions in visions and one of the American long term international policy goals thus comprises securing the American vision of international order. To prevail, *"we must sufficiently foresee the interests of great industrial nations and discourage them from taking over our leadership or from subverting the existing economic and political order."* (Tyler 1992:A1) Achieving this goal was supported by high investments in the military area and the development of new technologies. When compared to the military costs during the Cold War, the post-Cold War era costs were not much lower. From 2001 onwards even further increase of investments in military area can be observed (even if not taking Iraq

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<sup>5</sup> New security threats occurred later on in the form of international terrorism and, to a certain degree, have again justified the American central position in the international system.

<sup>6</sup> France was not in all cases very loyal supporter of the American policy; **Ch. de Gaulle** even decided to opt out from the NATO's military structures. Generally speaking, however, the French approach was rather supportive than criticizing.

and Afghanistan war costs in account) (Infoplease, 2007). According to many authors (Nye, 2002; Brzezinski, 1998) these investments play major role in securing the USA leading role in the international system further on.

If the American unilateralism is perceived in this way, it may be interpreted only as begin aimed at balancing the stability of the system on one hand and keeping the costs of doing so as low as possible without losing the influence that helps to influence and modify the system.

## **Conclusion**

The issue of American unilateralism represents one of the most discussed topics related to the post-Cold War American era. This paper aimed at showing the concept of the American unilateralism through less common optic. There were questions to be answered posed at the beginning of the paper; is the American unilateralism really the phenomenon of approximately last 20 years? Where we can find the roots of American unilateralism? Which were the impacts of the Cold War on the American unilateralism?

The answer to the first question – as indicated in first chapters of the text – has to be “no”. This leads to the answer to second question; the roots of the American unilateralism can be traced back to the very birth of the USA as an independent state. The main factors that enabled the development of this specific policy was the geographic isolation, the feeling of exceptionalism, favorable economic development and subsequently the position of economic hegemon in the world economic system, as well as mistrust to centralized decision making bodies. The ways of the American unilateralism were modified in the course of time; they however remained valid feature of the American foreign policy. The American unilateralism embodied itself e.g. in the Monroe doctrine or, later on, in the way the international political and financial system was reconstructed after the end of the Second World War. The USA gained at that time the position of hegemon in the capitalistic part of the world that was crucial for existence and stability of the newly created world order and international relations’ system. The USA was not only the main architect of the new international system; they, moreover, ensured both the economic stability of the system and its security. Security of the system could be under these circumstances considered public good, where the USA as the guarantor of the new international system order provided security to other members of the system, and, consequently, born the highest security costs of it but also

disposed of powers sufficient to maintain security and system stability (which included also the American use of unilateral policy and promotion of the American national interests).

In the Cold War era the position of the USA in the international system was strengthened due to higher security needs of the members of the system, stemming from the "East-West" tensions. The USA was perceived as the main security guarantor in the system (position clearly articulated by the NATO establishment), and as such could freely (and with support of Western allies) adopt unilateral approaches or carry out the unilateral actions. These approaches or actions led mainly to the consolidation of the American position in the international system, which was again crucial for other system's members who relied on the American security support and help. In connection with the security provision for the European allies there certain trend is to be observed. At the beginning of the Cold War we can observe strong support for the American policies articulated through the cooperation in the UN Security Council. This support slowly diminishes and in 1970s and 1980s when the Soviet threat is not perceived as a grave danger, there are even some counteractions showing themselves as European vetoes in Security Council against the American approaches. Together with this approach there is to be observed the diminishing willingness to share the security costs that the USA has to bear (low contributions of member states to NATO budget).

Immediately after the end of the Cold War due to the fact that "East-West" tensions were lifted the USA to a certain degree lost its importance as the security guarantor in the system. Many states in that time chose to delegate the security issues at the multilateral bodies of the UN type or to provide the security by national means or within the regional cooperation framework. On the other hand, however, the USA remained the guarantor of the economic international system order. As the competing socialist economic ideologies have failed, it may seem easier for the USA to cope with this role. However, this is not exactly the case. Other actors in the system (states, NGOs, MNCs) perceive only the decreasing security threats, but they do not appropriately reflect the cost of running the economic international system which the USA has to bear. With this fact there is closely interconnected the decreasing support for the American unilateralist actions. Some of these unilateral actions are however focused only on the consolidation of the American status in the international system and on closely interrelated spread of liberal-capitalistic ideology (Porter, 1998)

According to hegemonic stability theories, it is crucial for the USA how their central role in the system is going to be perceived in the future and, consequently, how much support for their actions they can extract (that is how efficiently they can use soft power tools). From the material point of view, the position of the USA in the system is going to be affected by their technological development, economic growth and military capabilities (Nye, 2002, p. 13). Depending on these facts, the degree of American unilateralism will either be higher or lower.

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