



**Ulrich Beck**

## The Cosmopolitan State

*Towards a Realistic Utopia*

The global terrorist threat is part of the risk society and blurs the distinction between internal and external security. Ulrich Beck concludes that in order to be able to deal with their national problems today's states have to de-nationalise and transnationalise themselves.

Terrorism operating on a global scale has opened a new chapter in world risk society. A clear distinction must be made between the attack itself and the terrorist threat which becomes universal as a result of it. What is politically crucial is ultimately not the risk itself but the perception of the risk. What men fear to be real is real in its consequences – fear creates its own reality. Capitalism requires optimism, which is destroyed by the collective belief in the terrorist threat, and that can plunge an already stumbling world economy into a state of crisis. Someone who sees the world as a terror risk, becomes incapable of action. That is the first trap the terrorists have set. The second trap: The perceived risk of terrorism, politically instrumentalised, unleashes security needs, which wipe out freedom and democracy, the very things which constitute the superiority of modernity. If we find ourselves faced with a choice between freedom or survival, then it is already too late, because most people will decide against freedom.

The greatest danger, therefore, is not the risk, but the perception of it, which releases fantasies of danger and of the antidotes to them, thereby robbing modern society of its freedom of action. Sheer cynicism is helpful in this context. How many times have we already experienced and survived the end of the world: Seveso, Chernobyl, climate change, toxins in our food, mad cow disease. The key question posed by the attacks, however, is, how much freedom *and* how much security, that is, how much insecurity, are necessary to survive.

A question repeatedly raised and discussed in the past was the following: What can unite the world? The experimental answer was: An attack from Mars. This terrorism is an attack from an inner Mars. For the length of a historical moment, at least, the quarrelling camps are united against the common enemy.

It is precisely the universalisation of the terrorist threat to the states of the world which makes the fight against global terrorism a challenge to international politics: alliances are forged across the opposing camps, regional conflicts are checked and so the cards of world politics are reshuffled. It is breathtaking how fast and radically the priorities of American foreign policy have been transformed. Until recently the project of a national missile defence system still dominated Washington's political thinking and actions, now it is no

longer mentioned. Instead the view appears to be establishing itself, that even a perfect missile defence system would not have prevented this attack – therefore the internal security of the USA can only be guaranteed by a global alliance and not by a single-handed technological-national initiative. Rivalries with Beijing and Moscow – for the time being at least – are put on the back burner, given that the requirements of the "defence" of the internal security of the USA in Afghanistan make co-operation with Russia, among others, essential. Meanwhile Israel and the Palestinians are being placed under intense pressure to achieve a genuine armistice, because this is considered to be a key to the participation of Arabic and Islamic states in the alliance against terrorism.

The power of the common front against terrorism has also opened up a new freedom of action for the European Union. Suddenly the rivalries between the various European nations dissolve and their common interests come to the fore, not only within Europe, but also between Europeans and the United States – a bad time for Euro-sceptics! A good time for Britain's entry into the European world. Of course, this common interest may now collapse in the acid test of the military operations now under way.

So how will political action in the age of globalisation be possible? My answer is this: through the perception of the global nature of the dangers, which turn the apparently fixed system of international and national politics into something fluid and malleable. It is necessary to distinguish between the risks and the opportunities presented by the dangers. The unseen opportunities of world risk society must be understood as political side effects of the dangers to life and limb. In this sense the present fear produces a quasi-revolutionary situation in world politics, which can be used in very different ways, leading to the end of the isolationism of US foreign policies, a foreign policy mission, which has its effect on the taming of national rivalries and regional conflicts, but also possibly to "just wars", producing crowds of new suicidal terrorists – and the reduction of freedoms, protectionism, demonisation of the cultural other.

The terror attack strengthens the state, but it undermines and dethrones two previously dominant ideas: the *nation* state and the *neo-liberal* state. Neo-liberalism and the idea of the free market are held to be the key to the future. They have developed a hegemonic force in the past two decades. It is certainly premature to talk in terms of the end of neo-liberalism. But the risk of global terrorism nevertheless provides a foretaste of the conflicts into which globalisation plunges the world. And in times of dramatic global conflict the principle of replacing politics and state by economics rapidly loses its ability to convince. Asked whether the 40 billion dollars, which the US government was requesting from Congress for the "war against terror" and for reconstruction did not contradict the commitment to neo-liberal economic policy with which the Bush administration came into office, the latter's spokesman replied laconically, "National security has priority."

But national security – and this is the second great lesson of the terrorist attack – is no longer national security. Of course, there were always alliances. The crucial difference, however, is that today global alliances are necessary not for external security, but also for *internal* security. The distinctions between internal and external, police and army, crime and war, war and peace, which underlie our conception of the world have gone and have to be renegotiated and re-established. But the category of the nation state thereby becomes a zombie category.

Previously it was the case, that foreign policy was a question of choice, not of necessity. Today, on the other hand, a new kind of combination of both is dominant: foreign and domestic policy, national security and international co-operation are very much enmeshed. In the face of the menace of global terrorism (but also of climate change, of migration, of toxins in food, of organised crime) the only path to national security is by way of transnational co-operation. The following paradoxical principle holds true: States must *de-nationalise* and *trans-nationalise* themselves for the sake of their own national interest, that is, relinquish sovereignty, in order, in a globalised world, to deal with their national problems. Following the terrorist attack, German domestic policy has become an important element in the domestic security policy of the USA, that is, of American foreign policy and thus of the interwoven domestic, foreign and defence policies of Germany, France, Pakistan, Great Britain, Russia and many other states besides.

Max Weber assumed that decisions on war and peace are among the "essential characteristics" of a state. I am a citizen of Munich. Who decides on war and peace on behalf of the citizens of Munich? The town council of Munich? The government of the State of Bavaria? The German Federal Parliament? The Federal Chancellor? The European Parliament? The European Commission? Nato? The President of the United States? The United Nations Security Council? It may be laid down formally, in fact it has become rather unclear. The prime national decision on war and peace is no longer the autonomous concern of individual states. What for Max Weber constituted an indivisible unity – sovereignty and statehood – diverged long ago. This means, that states' ability to act must *de facto* be conceptually understood and politically inferred independently of previously dominant ideas of sovereignty and autonomy.

The global terrorist threat inaugurates a new era of transnational and multilateral co-operation. It precisely does not lead to a renaissance of the nation state, but to the discovery and development of what I call *co-operative transnational states*. The national viewpoint becomes an impediment to the transnational invention of the political and of statehood in the age of globalisation. This is now being learned and spelled out by way of the suddenly emergent geo-political questions of an "inner security" without borders of ex-nation states, and can be transferred to questions of threatening climate change, of global poverty, of human rights.

Two ideal types of transnational co-operation between states are emerging – *transnational surveillance states* and *cosmopolitan states*. With the help of the new power of co-operation surveillance states threaten to develop into fortress states, in which security and the military are writ large and freedom and democracy very much take second place. Already there are voices clamouring that the societies of the West, spoiled by peace and affluence, lack the requisite sharp sense of friend and foe, and the willingness to sacrifice the precedence, which the marvel of human rights has thus far possessed, to the now necessary measures of self-defence. This talk of constructing an occidental citadel is omnipresent and will undoubtedly become louder in years to come: For globalisation winners there's neo-liberalism, for globalisation losers there remains the fear of terrorism and of foreigners – and in measured doses the poison of racism.

In future, in contrast, the essential question will be, what are you, what are we fighting *for*, when we are combating transnational terrorism? An answer would be a cosmopolitan state system based on the acknowledgement of the

otherness of the others. National states represent a threat to the inner diversity, to the multiple loyalties, to the flows and fluids which, in the age of globalisation, inevitably exist within their borders. Cosmopolitan states, on the other hand, emphasise the necessity of combining self-determination with responsibility for others, strangers within and without the national borders. It is not a matter of negating or even damning self-determination – on the contrary: It must be freed of its national tunnel vision and combined with a cosmopolitan opening to the interests of the world. Cosmopolitan states do not only fight against terrorism, but also against the causes of terrorism in the world. Out of the solution of global problems, which appear insoluble at the level of the individual state, they regain and renew the power of the political to shape and convince.

Cosmopolitan states are founded on the principle of the national indifference of the state. Just as the religious civil wars of the 17th century were ended at the Peace of Westphalia by the separation of state and religion, so could – this is my thesis – the national world (civil) wars of the 20th century be answered by a separation of state and nation. Just as it is only the areligious state which makes the practice of various religions possible in the first place, so cosmopolitan states would have to guarantee the co-existence of national and religious identities through the principle of constitutional tolerance.

One could and must rethink the experiment of a political Europe in this sense, as an experiment in cosmopolitan state formation. A cosmopolitan Europe, which draws its strength precisely not only from a fight against terrorism which simultaneously asserts liberal values, but also from the affirmation and domestication of European national diversity including its endearing elements of bloody-mindedness – that could be, or could become an altogether realistic utopia.

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