

The first failed empire of the 21st century

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American foreign policy has been recently dominated by the venture into Iraq. This has not gone well. Most criticism has focused on ‘mistakes’ – there were not enough US troops, or they were of the wrong type, the Iraqi army was mistakenly disbanded after it surrendered, looting was not anticipated, oil expectations were unreal, the US depended too much on Iraqi exile claims, and so forth. Indeed, these were mistakes. 250,000 troops trained also in police roles would have made a difference. So might Iraqi army units converted into security police. So might better planning all round. But the mistakes were only the surface phenomena of a more profound American failure. The Iraq venture was doomed from the outset by the attempt to create what some neo-conservatives styled a ‘New American Empire’. This exaggerated American powers, made facile historical comparisons with previous Empires, mis-identified the enemy, and mis-identified the century we live in. This early twenty-first century attempt at Empire is failing. There will not be others.

From my previous research in comparative and historical sociology, I had drawn two relevant conclusions. First, to exercise general power requires a combination of four more specific powers: ideological, economic, military and political. Most regimes wield unequal combinations of them, and some regimes may be quite light on one or two. But the new imperialists relied overwhelmingly on military power alone – and indeed on only one part of military power, offensive fire-power. This is insufficient to create empire. Second, the world moved in the late twentieth century from an Age of Empires and imperial ideologies to an Age of Nation-States, complete with nationalist and anti-imperialist ideologies. The shift undermined any contemporary attempt to found empire. To these I now added a third conclusion: the balance of power has shifted in crucial military and ideological respects away from the Great Powers and the North toward poorer social movements in the South.

These three points did not seem evident to many others. Neo-conservatives, breaking with the American aversion to the word ‘empire’, proclaimed the coming of a New American Empire. ‘The fact is’, said Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Charles Krauthammer, ‘no country has been as dominant culturally, economically, technologically and militarily in the history of the world since the late Roman Empire’. Robert Kaplan compared the US to Rome after the Second Punic War. It was a second ‘universal power’ and it must deploy ‘warrior politics’ to achieve a *pax*

* This article reworks some of the themes and brings up-to-date some of the facts contained in my book *Incoherent Empire* (London: Verso, 2003).

americana (though he advised more caution, as well as thought for the consequences of action, than was actually employed).¹ Conservative writers endorsed the imperial noun, though rarely the imperialist adjective. Though politicians have tended to imitate Donald Rumsfeld, who declared 'We do not do empire', Vice-President Dick Cheney and his wife Lynne sent out a Christmas card in 2003 containing this quote from Benjamin Franklin: 'And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an Empire can rise without His aid?'²

British historians resident in the US concurred in this view of American power, playing Greeks at the imperial Roman court. Niall Ferguson urged the US to use its immense powers to take on the global imperial burden formerly shouldered by Great Britain.³ Paul Kennedy of Yale University flattered his hosts with his article 'The Greatest Superpower Ever'.⁴ The Texan Philip Bobbitt wrote a massive book on the history of war, states and international law, culminating in the emergence of a globally benevolent America. His constitutional theory rates democracy and human rights above state sovereignty. If a state is not democratic and does not protect human rights (like Iraq), then its 'cloak of sovereignty' should no longer protect it from military intervention. The United States, being immensely powerful, democratic and committed to human rights, is the only Power which combines the might and the right to pre-emptively attack states which cultivate terrorism or weapons of mass destruction.⁵ Since half the states in the world are neither genuinely democratic nor respectful of human rights, his constitutional theory places much of the world at risk.

There is a common Hobbesian theme in these views. The international order is anarchic and many states in the world are disorderly and/or threaten others. World order needs a sovereign, a Leviathan, and there is only one possible candidate, the United States. This idea had already been voiced during the 1990s, after the Soviet collapse. Since the US was now the only Superpower, could it not use its position for 'humanitarian interventionism' – American military force to restore human rights and end famines, civil wars and genocides? It had been liberals who led the way. Though liberals usually prefer multilateral intervention, their doubts about the capacities of the United Nations led them into endorsing more leadership, even unilateralism. Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor are re-interpreted as successful humanitarian interventions and Rwanda is cited as a lost opportunity. Of course, the most successful case had been the communist Vietnamese army's incursion into Cambodia in 1979 to end the horrendous killings of the Khmer Rouge, though Americans preferred to ignore this case. Whatever their reservations about the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, many liberals have ultimately endorsed them on humanitarian grounds: they ended the atrocities of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein.⁶

¹ *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands A Pagan Ethos* (New York: Random House, 2002,

² *The Los Angeles Times*, 24 January 24 2004).

³ In two books: *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), and *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004),

⁴ In *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Winter 2002.

⁵ *The Shield of Achilles* (New York: Knopf, 2001), pp. 678ff.

⁶ Michael Ignatieff is the most eloquent 'humanitarian interventionist'. See his *Empire Lite: Nation Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan* (London: Minerva, 2003).

Some liberals disagree. An Empire based on military interventionism and unilateralism, what Joseph Nye has called 'hard' power, risks undermining its more consensual 'soft' powers.⁷ I prefer to term the latter 'hegemony', a word which indicates that the imperial power establishes 'the rules of the game' by which others routinely play. They may come to also approve of the rules as well, so that hegemony becomes genuinely legitimate. But the basis of hegemony is more of a matter-of-fact acceptance of things 'as the way they are'. Then peoples' own everyday actions help reproduce the dominance without much thought. I instance the role of the dollar as the world's reserve currency below. Hegemony should be an invisible hand, lying behind the accepted rules of the game. The catch is that to be hegemonic, the US might have to play by the rules. Abandon the rules, and it risks losing hegemony.

The Marxian-influenced left has long denounced US imperialism. Yoking together the power of the US and of capitalism, leftists tend to blame most of the world's ills on the US, so crediting it with enormous powers. They agree with the neo-conservatives that this is imperialism, they just see it as a bad thing. Perry Anderson sees no significant challenge to US power and hegemony anywhere. Other Powers grumble, but they acquiesce. Even the consent of victims can be bought out by American capitalism, he says. Robert Wade writes elegantly of the 'Unipolar' and 'empire-like power' of a US-dominated world economy. His call for a more multi-polar world is an ethical demand, not a product of any real 'balancing' in the actual workings of the economy.⁸ The 'anti-globalisation' movement repeatedly denounces American domination of the world economy, which it blames for global poverty, exploitation and environmental degradation. Left and right mostly agree: this is the Age of American Empire. They disagree only on whether it is a good thing.

French critics snipe on the sidelines. Former French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine's term *hyper-puissance* maliciously suggests a hyperactive, antisocial child – who is also unfortunately a Superpower. Historian and demographer Emmanuel Todd goes further. He says that American power has been in decline since the 1950s, and that its current attempt at empire is a sign of its imminent demise as a global power. He sees Europe, Japan and China as increasingly challenging leadership.⁹ World systems theorists compare American power to earlier British, Dutch, Roman and Chinese hegemonic powers and see hegemonic decline as already begun. Thus Immanuel Wallerstein, has offered trenchant criticism of recent American ventures.¹⁰ Patrick O'Brien criticises world systems theorists for overstating British 'hegemony' in the nineteenth century, and he ridicules their notion that the Dutch had comparable powers. He concludes there has never been a Superpower like the US.¹¹

⁷ *The Paradox of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). A similar view underlies Andrew Bacevich's *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁸ Perry Anderson, 'Force and Consent', *New Left Review*, New Series, no. 17 (Sept-October 2002); Robert Wade 'The Invisible Hand of the American Empire', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 17: 2 (2003).

⁹ *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order* (New York: Columbia University Press).

¹⁰ 'The Eagle Has Crash-Landed', *Foreign Policy* (July-August, 2002). See also various essays in Volker Bornschier and Christopher Chase-Dunn (eds.), *The Future of Global Conflict* (London: Sage, 1999).

¹¹ 'The governance of globalisation: the political economy of Anglo-American hegemony, 1793–2003', Working paper no. 1023, *Center for Economic Studies and Ifo Institute for Economic Research* (September 2003).

In Volume II of *The Sources of Social Power*, I also argued that world order during the nineteenth century was a product not only of British leadership in matters industrial, financial and naval, but also of a multilateral 'Concert of Great Powers', and of a capitalism that had strongly transnational as well as national powers. O'Brien is also right to say that the US is much more dominant over its main rivals than Britain ever was. But we must not deduce too much from this. For empire, domination over the 'natives' is much more important than domination over rival Powers. Yet none of the writers gives serious analysis of the powers possessed by the natives. This is a big mistake, for these powers have recently risen, to the detriment of all pretensions to direct, territorial imperialism.

But amid this supportive intellectual environment, in which many said the US could achieve empire, the administration of Bush the Younger acted. Senior administration figures like Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, plus second-tier Assistant Secretary figures like Douglas Feith, John Bolton and J.D. Crouch, plus supportive Republican Congressmen and Senators, believed the US had the power to remake Afghanistan and Iraq, restructure the Middle East, and eliminate much of the terrorism and weapons of mass destruction across the world. Actually, they did see a potential shift in power around the world. They saw danger posed by terrorism and WMDs, deploying 'weapons of the weak' which allowed groups of malcontents and lesser states to ignore American threats and even launch attacks on the American homeland – as happened on 9-11. Nuclear, and more especially chemical and biological weapons, have spread downwards from the great to the lesser Powers; while loose terrorist networks threaten our homeland security. Since they violate sovereignty, so should we, say the new imperialists. Now is the time to strike against their threat, for another decade might be too late. American global domination might be short-lived if we do not act.

Their goals were limited. They did not want to permanently rule over foreign lands. The US has been generally content with an indirect and informal Empire, able to pressure and threaten, but only in the last resort to invade. So now the US would effect regime change and then leave with a more friendly regime in place – a temporary territorial imperialism, confined to a few places. The prosperous North of the world contained neither disorder nor military rivals nor collective resistance. All that the US required was that the other Northern states stick to their own affairs and not interfere in American imperial projects elsewhere. It correctly expected they were too divided to interfere, and believed it could divide-and-rule among them. It was also cautious about interfering in sub-Saharan Africa and much of southern Asia. For the moment only two regions were in its sights, the central core of the Muslim world, in the Middle East plus western Asia, and north-east Asia. The focus was on the 'Axis of Evil', 'rogue states' North Korea, Iraq and Iran, though with Syria sometimes also informally added. If threats against them failed, we would subject them to temporary territorial imperialism. After success, more rogue states could be added to our firing-sights.¹²

¹² The programme is still being vigorously advocated by ex-administration officials David Frum and Richard Perle, in their book *An End to Evil: How To Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003). They add Saudi Arabia to the usual list of targets – as well as the US Department of State!

The new imperialists pointed to historical examples. In 1945 the US occupied Japan and with our allies occupied Germany. Our forces occupied the countries for several years and showered them with dollars to assist economic recovery. They did not observe how unusually favourable were the conditions. The locals were desperate for peace, after six years of war for the Germans, more for the Japanese. Defeat had been looming for two years, their cities were in ashes, and survival was their main desire. They were relieved when the war ended, and almost no one wished to restart it. No American soldiers were killed by hostile fire after surrender. Japan and especially Germany also had recent experience of democracy and knew exactly how to restart parties, elections and parliaments. Neo-conservatives did not remark these massive differences from Afghanistan or Iraq, though the author of a major book on those cases pointed them out.¹³

I now enumerate the power resources of the United States, asking whether they were sufficient for this new form of 'temporary territorial imperialism'. They were not.

Economic power

Though US domination of the world economy is much less than in the first decades after 1945, it remains the main engine of global growth. It enjoys a slight lead in many hi-tech industries, though the consumption and indebtedness of its citizens provide the main global economic dynamic. In overall volume of production and trade the US is now only one of three major economic blocs, level with the European Union, somewhat ahead of Japan/ East Asia. But since neither 'rival' is a single state, they find it much more laborious to devise common economic policies. As a single actor the US is more than double the size of any other. It tends to initiate policy while its two rivals react, though they can block its initiatives and force compromise. The US cannot act unilaterally in bodies like the WTO or the G-8 to dictate global economic policy. Any hegemony in production and trade would be more accurately called 'Northern', since the three Northern blocs collectively provide over 80 per cent of world production, trade and finance, and over 95 per cent of its R&D.

It is finance which adds American hegemony. The dollar remains the world's reserve currency and Wall Street trades two-thirds of the value of the world's stocks and shares. Since values are ultimately denominated in dollars, much of other nations' reserves and savings are held in dollars. This security means it offers only low interest rates, so that foreigners are essentially lending money to the US. Thus American consumers can amass large debts and American governments can finance massive trade and budget deficits. The poorer countries subsidise the American economy far more than they ever receive in US development aid. The US is the

¹³ Richard Merritt et al., *Democracy Imposed: US Occupation Policy and the German Public, 1945–1948* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton, 1999). Dower's comparative article on Afghanistan and Iraq appeared in *The New York Times*, 27 October 2002.

biggest debtor nation, a sign of strength, giving it a unique degree of financial freedom.¹⁴ It also aids the US to maintain an enormous military budget, year in, year out, without the strains which were manifest in previous Empires. To maintain this hegemony and this disguised military subsidy obviously requires that foreign investors do not lose confidence in American stewardship. While some capital flight from the US has been evident over the last two years, it has been offset by the growing trade deficit of the US with China and other Asian economies, which spend their surpluses on investing in the US, mainly in short-term Treasury bonds. Financial hegemony remains, becoming a little more precarious, but not yet seriously threatened. It would be extremely risky for the biggest fund-holders to deliberately move out of dollars, especially since the main rival, the Euro, is directed by a looser and less stable EU governance structure.

The US uses these economic powers to further its strategic interests through aid, trade and loans. The mix has not changed greatly over the last two decades. The new imperialists have not introduced a new economic policy – a sign perhaps of their obsession with military power.

US aid programmes remain geared to strategic goals. About one-third of US aid throughout the last decade has gone to its closest ally, Israel. A further fifth has gone to Egypt and Jordan so that they will not attack Israel. Most of the rest has gone to sundry small allies (Colombia, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and so on). Yet the total volume of aid has been low, only around \$10–15 bn per year, in *per capita* terms the smallest foreign aid budget of any OECD country. Most African countries get less aid from the US than from Europe.

In 2003 came the first major consequence of the new imperialism. US aid suddenly more than doubled as \$21 bn was pumped into Iraq, plus a military budget of \$66 bn for Iraq following hard upon another one of \$75 bn. Congress (reflecting popular American feeling) grumbled that Iraqis should pay for their own reconstruction. Congress will probably insist on loans not grants if another major Iraqi request comes. This is not a good omen for American Empire. It is doubtful whether Americans want their leaders to pay for Empire, however temporary. Over the last decades Americans have consistently resisted tax increases even for increased services at home. It is unlikely they will support them for foreign imperial ventures. Americans believe theirs is a nation-state, not an Empire.

In the mid-nineteenth century Britain had comparable economic strength to the US today but was able to invest in empire and then break even. By 1900 its military costs were only about 2.5 per cent of GDP, compared to 4 per cent in the US today, and the empire was breaking even financially. This is unlikely in the US case unless the US were to take more control of Iraqi oil production than seems possible. The Belgians made a large profit in Africa by focusing on valuable raw materials and by inflicting enormous sufferings on Africans. At their worst the British also looted their colonies, but at their best they made initial investments which paid-off later in profits for themselves and in economic development for the colonies (this has been emphasised by Niall Ferguson). The US has the wealth to do the same, but it seems unlikely that it can loot the world in the old imperial way, and it is doubtful whether

¹⁴ Peter Gowan, *Global Gamble. Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance* (London: Verso, 1999). Robert Wade gives a succinct account of these powers in his essay 'The invisible hand . . .'.

American voters would support the initial investment to do more. It is not so much the material resources which are lacking as the supportive ideologies to deploy them.

Yet aid is less important than trade, where American policy is more vigorous. Recent administrations have said they believe that global growth flows from freeing up markets and cutting back the role of government. This 'neo-liberalism' or 'Washington Consensus' can be seen as indirect economic imperialism, though it is also claimed to be benevolent, leading to global economic growth. Neo-liberalism was preached more under Clinton than Bush, and in any case has been more rhetoric than actual policy. Free trade is encouraged more for others than the US itself, which has consistently subsidised its own agriculture and intermittently subsidised industries threatened by imports (currently especially steel and textiles). But this is not a distinctive American imperialism. In these respects the US is no different from the European Union or Japan. Together the three dominated previous WTO rounds of partial trade liberalisation, even imposing some free trade agreements on the poorer countries without their realising how damaging these might be for themselves – as in the 'intellectual property rights' agreement. The first serious threats to this Northern domination came from Southern countries at the Cancun meeting of the WTO in 2003. This challenge seems likely to be maintained, since the WTO has a fairly democratic constitution. For its part the US is meeting the challenge by offering bilateral deals to individual Southern countries, typically offering limited access to US markets in return for support of US foreign policy. This remains a formidable inducement, since the US is the biggest economy under the control of a single government.

But the main bite of biased neoliberalism comes with international loans. Power in the main lending agencies – the IMF, the World Bank, and other international development banks – is not democratically distributed. This is distinctively American imperialism, principally because the US dominates the constitutions of these organisations, with the other Northern economies holding less power and the Southern countries virtually none. The US Treasury dominates their policies.

International loans become problematic only if a country falls into debt. So the US Treasury has virtually no lending powers over other Northern economies, or over successfully developing countries which do not need loans, like India and China. But the story has been different over much of the South. In the 1970s Northern banks had offered very low interest rates to Southern countries and they borrowed very large sums to finance economic development. But in 1979 US Fed chairman Paul Volcker suddenly raised US interest rates (for reasons unconnected to the South), which meant their interest payments shot up and they couldn't pay. A massive Southern debt crisis began, boosted through the East Asian financial crisis of 1997, with knock-on effects on Russia and Brazil.

When any business gets in debt to a bank, the bank seeks to restructure the payment of the debt and vet the firm's business plans. The US Treasury controls the IMF and World Bank. If they refuse a loan, then all the other international lending organisations also refuse. So the US Treasury becomes effectively the world's creditor bank and presses neoliberal terms for debt repayment. These are the 'structural adjustment programmes' whose primary purpose is not economic development but to get the debts repaid. To achieve this, the US seeks to impose fiscal austerity (cut government spending and raise taxes), high interest rates, currency stabilisation, privatisation of government enterprises, and liberalisation of trade, capital markets

and labour markets. This is fairly direct economic imperialism, since it clearly increases the control by the US government and American corporations and banks over the domestic economies of indebted countries. However, other Northern corporations and banks also benefit from this. The US is here the hegemonic leader of the North, against indebted parts of the South.

Few of these programmes have much helped debtor countries, while some have harmed them. Social inequality has been a more common outcome than growth, especially in poorer countries, and this has generated global discontent. The IMF and World Bank have come under increasing attack even from economists.¹⁵ The IMF defensively renamed its 'structural adjustment' programmes 'poverty reduction and growth' programmes, and the World Bank, which used to ignore or condemn states, now recognise effective states as promoting growth. In the South structural adjustment programmes are widely denounced as global economic imperialism in which the rich, led by the US, exploit the poor.

Southern governments are sovereign nation-states. They, not the US, implement their economic policies. They want re-election, oligarchies want to keep power, and even generals fear social unrest. A contradiction results between the demands of the American-led international financial community and the needs of local political leaders. Most democratic governments cannot produce short-term economic misery for the sake of a slightly dubious vision of the longterm, for in the meantime they will lose the next election. The US cannot force reform on them, as is clear currently in the case of Argentina, which since 2002 has refused to comply with IMF directives, partially defaulting on its repayments. In the global economy, the US is only a back-seat driver, nagging the real driver, the sovereign state, sometimes administering sharp blows to his head. But the US does not steer the automobile and hitting the driver makes a crash more likely. The US, through its banking surrogates, has some supporters among Southern elites, and some governments comply. But more usually compromise ensues, which may not be the best way to steer an automobile. Latin American governments liberalise the more internationally visible banking and trade sectors, while dragging their heels on labour markets, and preserving social security provisions. When things go wrong, the US gets some of the blame. Though Europe and Japan are also heavily implicated in these policies, they get off lightly.

So these US actions are seen more as power than hegemony, which they therefore threaten. Bush administration actions have been hardened by a neo-conservatism, driven by domestic concerns, in environmental and energy programmes. The only delegate to get jeered and heckled at the Johannesburg Earth Summit Conference in September 2002 was not some oppressive dictator, nor even some stony-hearted corporate CEO. It was Colin Powell, not a neo-con, representing the United States of America. Al-Jazeera's web-site of cartoons from across the Arab world depicts the war on Iraq as primarily a grab for oil. This was certainly a motive, probably

¹⁵ For example, Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 2002), and Ha-Joon Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder* (London: Anthem Press, 2002). On inequality effects, see Samuel Morley, *The Income Distribution Problem in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Santiago, Chile: CEPAL/ECLAC, 2001); William Easterly, 'The effect of IMF and World Bank programs on poverty', unpublished paper (World Bank: February 2001); and Branko Milanovic, 'Can we discern the effect of globalization on income distribution? Evidence from household budget surveys', International Trade 0302004, Economics Working Paper Archive at WUSTL.

driven more by future needs than present ones (for most oil scenarios envisage a scissors movement of continued rising demand faced with supplies declining sometime after 2010). America's economic policies now incur resentment and suspicion around the world.

These are very mixed economic powers, permitting US leadership and financial hegemony, but neither actual domination nor much legitimacy across much of the world. There are no Great Power economic rivals, for the other Northern economies also benefit from the main thrust of US policy. But US economic powers have not been systematically engaged in the new imperialism. There was an attempt to buy Security Council votes over Iraq in 2003, but this lamentably failed. American economic strength lies in back-seat driving, through the dollar and through international financial institutions. It is less suited to underwriting imperialism, and Americans would be dubious about this anyway. Indeed, I do not believe that this new imperialism was much driven by economic power goals. American goals were multiple and never very closely examined. Neo-conservatives never seem to have prioritised their goals, since they believed their military power would enable them to achieve them all.

Military power

Military resources dominated the minds of the neo-conservatives. They correctly perceived that American military power has no rival. Japan and Europe do not pursue military power, the Soviet enemy collapsed, and Russia and China want entry into the capitalist world. Almost all the world's military budgets are declining, except the American. Its military budget for 2003 was 40 per cent of the world's total military spending, exceeding the spending of the next 24 states combined. It was 25 times greater than the combined spending of all seven 'rogue states' identified by the US as its enemies. The gap is growing wider.¹⁶ The US is a military giant.

Its enormous nuclear arsenal is not decisive here. The growing number of nuclear states all possess defence by deterrent, though the US arsenal gives it alone almost absolute invulnerability to attack from any rational enemy dependent on fixed, targetable assets. This is a higher level of defence than any state has ever possessed throughout history. The new imperialists felt it was wise to strike before minor but hostile Powers might also acquire such weapons, but right now the rest of the world should worry about its own defences. The Bush administration is developing the Star Wars anti-ballistic missile defence system and new battlefield nuclear weapons (at University of California-run laboratories), while threatening nuclear pre-emptive strikes. But nuclear weapons cannot be used to acquire empire, unless we wanted a radioactive one.

The US also enjoys global deployment and fire-power. Only the US has global reach, with military facilities in 132 countries, with full-scale bases in about 40. Chalmers Johnson describes this as 'an Empire of bases', giving the US a 'footprint

¹⁶ Data from Stockholm Peace Research Institute, Center for Defense Information, and International Institute of Strategic Studies web-sites.

across the world'.¹⁷ Yet almost none of these bases projects power into the host country. These are not old-style imperial garrisons, keeping close control over local client rulers. In fact, movement in and out of them usually requires the permission of the host government. Rather, the bases project American fire-power elsewhere. It is this strike-power which confers the enormity of American offensive power. No-one else has such airplanes, missiles, ships, tanks and other capital-intensive, technology-laden weapons. It has a virtual monopoly of 'smart' (self-guided, once launched) and 'brilliant' (completely robotic) weapons. These first emerged during the 1990s in the so-called 'revolution in military affairs', the RMA, coined by Pentagon guru Andrew Marshall to refer to 'a major change in the nature of warfare brought about by the innovative application of new technologies which, combined with dramatic changes in military doctrine and operational and organisational concepts, fundamentally alters the character and conduct of military operations'. It combined long-range precision radar-guided missiles and bombs with 'information warfare' deploying satellites in space, airborne cameras, handheld global positioning systems, and robot sensors. RMA-equipped forces can inflict enormous damage on the enemy, with very low US casualties. Even the US infantryman's M-16/M4 rifle can now deliver 90 rounds a minute, disintegrating human beings 2,000 feet away – even without the attachable grenade-launcher.

The Afghan war of 2001–2002 and the Iraq invasion of 2003 showed the offensive utility of the system. In both cases enemy forces were devastated before their own weapons could come within range of Americans.¹⁸ Significantly, most of the new imperialists refer to the RMA and the new weaponry as their greatest resource – apart from ritual incantations about democracy.

No comparable military Power had previously existed. The US has a massive intimidatory presence to any state which dares to stand up to it. Military defiance would be a very high-risk strategy. The lack of rivals is truly unique in the history of the world, just as the new imperialists say. The US dwarfs Britain's nineteenth century military leadership. True, its Royal Navy was deliberately kept bigger than the next two largest navies combined, and in reality it sometimes exceeded the next four. This meant that Britain was also defensively invulnerable (since it comprised islands and there were no airplanes). It also possessed unrivalled striking power across the seas and along the coastlines of the world. But British army strength only ranked fifth in the world, behind Germany, France, Russia and Austria-Hungary. So Britain could not coerce or conquer its own continent, and it had well-armed rivals spread right across the Northern hemisphere. Indeed all previous Empires, including Rome and China, always had powerful neighbours whose military powers restrained their actions.

¹⁷ *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan, 2004).

¹⁸ Andrew W. Marshall, 'Some Thoughts on Military Revolutions', Memorandum for the Record, OSD Office of Net Assessment, 27 July 1993. It was hoped that the precision of 'smart' bombs would also bring low civilian casualties. Marshall himself claimed 'only the bad guys get hurt'. The claim proved only partly true. Around 10,000 civilians dead in Afghanistan, perhaps 15,000 in Iraq. This is a lot of corpses, though low by most historical conquest comparisons. The most comprehensive estimates of casualties have been provided on two web-sites: <<http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold> and www.iraqbodycount.org>. I discuss them and rival estimates in *Incoherent Empire*, pp. 129–31 and 227–8.

Yet though offensive fire-power can achieve battlefield victory, it cannot unaided deliver imperial pacification. In battle, forces are concentrated, so fire-power is what matters. But in pacification, force dispersion occurs, and this requires more soldiers. The British Empire in the nineteenth century generally calculated that at least 250 per cent more troops were needed for pacification than for initial conquest. The US has 1.45 m men and women under arms, down from 2.2 m in the 1980s. This is less than China's 2.5 m, just greater than the million-plus of India, North Korea and Russia. The US only has 5 per cent of the world's soldiers, and they are obviously insufficient to patrol the whole world.

Even these figures are grossly misleading. Only just over half of the 1.45 m are 'active', and only about 174,000 troops can be logistically deployed abroad at any one time. This is fewer deployable combat troops than either the British or Roman Empires possessed at their height. US fighting forces are now fully-engaged across the world, with 135,000 troops in Iraq, 8,000 in Afghanistan, 36,000 in South Korea, and the rest scattered around the many global bases. For Iraq the US has been forced to call up most of its part-time reservist soldiers and then arbitrarily extend their tours of duty – as it has done again in April 2004. Morale is reported to be low. And in Iraq only just under half the 135,000 are actually fighting troops. If we divide them into three shifts, then only around 21,000 can be out on active duty at any one time. There are 39,000 cops in New York City alone, a much less dangerous place. This is already imperial overstretch. That there are also 15–20,000 armed foreign security guards – in effect mercenary paramilitaries – in Iraq is a clear sign of overstretch. But these are only lightly armed men in an alien land – no match for the insurgents. Another American military intervention elsewhere is simply not possible until Iraq is normalised.

Furthermore, a second 'revolution in military affairs' has turned the tide of pacification technology against imperialism. Guerilla fighters are now better-equipped, especially in urban warfare, than their historical predecessors. The Kalashnikov assault rifle, the shoulder-held anti-tank missile, Semtech, ammonium nitrate, cellphone-activated bombs and so on, are freely available globally, ideal weapons to take out small numbers of Great Power troops and helicopters, as seen today in Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq. The deadliest weapon is of course the suicide bomber, nurtured in recent guerilla national liberation struggles, first in Sri Lanka, then in the Middle East. The US may be a military giant, but it is vulnerable to armed rats scuttling around its feet. The Bush administration does call them 'rats' fleeing into 'rat-holes' after they strike.

Empire, however temporary, requires mopping-up operations, the quelling of rebellions and riots, and a gradual transition from military to policing roles. Yet this is becoming a more challenging task, and the US lacks the soldiers to do it alone. Allied forces might ease the strain, which brings me to issues of political power.

Political power

American political power is schizophrenic, aware of the strengths of multilateralism, but increasingly drawn by unilateralism. The US might be restrained by either international political institutions or by resistance from the countries in which it intends

to intervene. There is little restraint from the former. Though the international order is premised formally on the sovereign equality of states, some are more equal than others. The United Nations Security Council still embodies the inequalities of the late 1940s, allowing five permanent members (the US, the USSR/ Russia, China, Britain and France) veto powers. But in reality two Superpowers, and then only one, dominated the Council. During the 1990s the US dominated UN resolutions, sanctions and military interventions. It used its veto more than all the other Security Council Powers combined. If the US opposed force, there was no force; and until 2003 whenever the US wanted force, it secured it.¹⁹ American power explains why Iraq was never offered carrots, as well as sticks, to disarm.²⁰ The US sometimes had to pursue laborious arm-twisting and bribing, but it almost always worked. From the Soviet collapse until late 2002 no powers got together to thwart the American will. The thought did not often occur to them, since American power was fairly hegemonic – routinised and mostly legitimate. It could rely on support from Britain and (usually) France on the Security Council, plus the rest of Western Europe and the other Anglo-Saxon countries, and Japan and other East Asian allies, plus most of Latin America. The US and not the UN had offered security to most of the world. The other states of the North had been under American protection since 1945, unable to defend themselves against communism without American help. America dominated security organisations like NATO and SEATO. Whatever their jealousies and resentments, states in the ‘free world’ believed they had common interests with the US. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO was expanded eastward and former communist countries scrambled for American favours.

If this is called ‘multilateralism’, why should the US want unilateralism? US intervention without the political mandate of the United Nations incurs costs in military, economic and ideological power. The mandate brings unconditional permissions to use foreign bases, allied troops, the cash to fund the venture, and above all legitimacy. Europe, not the US, paid most of the costs of rebuilding Yugoslavia; Germany, Japan and the Arab oil states paid for most of the 1991 Gulf War. UN legitimacy particularly allows states to support actions which are unpopular with their own people. They hide behind UN authority and say ‘We are reluctant, but it is the will of the world’. Intervention goes better for the US when formally multilateral.

But in 2003 the new imperialism stripped away the multilateral fig leaves. The Bush administration was unable to assemble a UN Security Council vote to fully and explicitly back an invasion of Iraq. So it went ahead almost unilaterally, with troops coming only from the US, Britain and Australia, plus 56 Polish Special Forces. The new imperialists believed they could do conquest virtually unilaterally, and they could. The UN, Europe, Russia, China and Japan now remained irrelevant to the invasion and even to the first stages of the subsequent unravelling of the pacification process, up to the end of 2003. These supposed ‘rivals’ were powerless to stop the invasion. They sat on the sidelines, first disconsolately, then with barely-

¹⁹ This is what Michael Ignatieff called ‘empire lite’, in his *Empire Lite: Nation Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan*.

²⁰ Phyllis Bennis, *Calling the Shots: How Washington Dominates Today's UN* (New York: Interlink Publishing, 1996).

concealed gloating. In the very short period when the US thought the war was going well, menacing threats were made against Syria and Iran, though a sudden tactical silence had descended on US policy toward the tougher nut of North Korea. But the new imperialists still believed that the US could remake the world, and the rival Powers would eventually be forced back on the American team, under American terms. They wanted Iraqi loans repaid and Iraqi oil contracts. So the policy did not initially fail on abandonment of so-called multilateralism, though in the aftermath more allied troops would have been useful for pacification.

However, it is the local allies who are more crucial to imperialism. Previous empires had rarely provided many of their own troops for pacification. They relied on local political allies from the conquered territory. The European Empires (and the Romans before them) initially ruled indirectly, through local native allies. Their conquests were aided by local princes and potentates feeling oppressed by the local ruler, desiring to share in the imperial spoils. European troops focused their superior fire-power on the capital and major cities, while larger native forces fanned out over the territories to repress any resistance.

After pacification the imperialists might continue ruling indirectly, through client notables. If the colony was valuable, they gradually increased control over the local allies, and soon integrated them as soldiers and administrators into their own colonial regimes. In European empires, almost all officers remained Europeans, but the bulk of the rank-and-file and the NCOs were natives. In India British troops provided only between 50,000 and 78,000 out of a force total of between 250,000 and 290,000. About 80 per cent of both the army and the police force were usually Indians. In African colonies natives comprised about 90 per cent in British colonies, and 98 per cent in the Belgian Congo. The Germans used the most European soldiers (about 40 per cent) and they were among the least successful and most repressive colonisers. Colonial troops also fought for their masters abroad. Over 130,000 Indian troops fought in Belgium and France in World War I and over 150,000 African troops fought for Britain in Asia in World War II. It seems extraordinary today – what concern of theirs were these wars?

Even 'direct' imperial civilian administration usually worked through strengthening the authority of loyal princes, chiefs and tribal and village councils, and ruling through them. One thousand British members of the Indian Civil Service were able to administer 250 m natives; 1,200 British civil servants administered a dozen African territories with a combined population of 43 m. Native allies were always better pacifiers, policemen, judges and civil servants because they had local knowledge and control networks on the ground. This is how Empires ruled in the Age of Empires. By the early twentieth century their ranks included American imperialists.²¹

As these empires collapsed, the Cold War began. But the US kept up a comparable policy in its ensuing fifty-year 'informal Empire', dominating countries without

²¹ M. Hasan, *John Company to the Republic* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2001), pp. 107–8, 120; P.S. Gupta and A. Deshpande (eds.), *The British Raj and its Armed Forces, 1857–1939* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. x, xx, 8; T. A. Heathcote, *The Military in British India* (Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 117, 127; T. Royle, *The Last Days of the Raj* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), p. 34. L.H. Gann and P. Duignan, *Colonialism in Africa 1870–1960*, vol. II (Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 5–8, 316. Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), and *Colonial West Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1978).

the need of formal territorial controls. Because the Cold War was believed to be between rival economic and political ideologies, the US found 'native allies' among elites who favoured capitalism and liberal democracy over socialism. Given a little aid, these conservative elites usually proved more powerful than their leftist opponents. Only in a few cases, like Cuba and Vietnam, was the US confronted by leftist regimes successfully mobilising most of the nation against it. But the Age of the Cold War is also over.

In Afghanistan, an almost-valueless country near the edge of the American logistical reach on the ground (though not in the air), the new imperialists maintained imperial traditions, relying heavily on local allies. Only about 300 Americans were on the ground as the Northern Alliance neared Kabul, and they were Special Forces spotters giving coordinates to US bombers and CIA agents with suitcases brimming with dollars to buy Afghan warlords. After the conquest, US forces were strengthened to about 8,000 Americans plus several thousand other foreign allies. But the country outside of Kabul is mainly run by the Northern Alliance and other warlords, with the Karzai regime and the US only retaining very tenuous overall control. In fact, this is a typical case of indirect rule over a low-value colony. Perhaps the new imperialists had begun with higher aspirations, for stable, even democratic rule over the whole country. But realities on the ground and lack of will to invest resources, intensified by the demands of the Iraqi invasion, forced them to settle for much less. If the US thought Hamid Karzai, the Afghan President, could last for six months after we left, we would probably do so – and certainly if we captured Osama bin Laden.

But Iraq has oil, is strategic to US base needs and had been vaguely threatening Israel. Thus our ambition there was much greater, though our resources were less proportionate to it. Yet the US invaded without a proper political plan or political allies. Plan A was that Iraqi generals would desert, overthrow Saddam and form a new client regime either before the invasion actually started or as it proceeded. Plan B was that US troops would be regarded as liberators and the various Iraqi factions would all assemble together and form a new, viable government in a peaceful environment. Both expectations were naive, a product of a Pentagon-run policy sidelining any experts familiar with Middle Eastern or Iraqi politics.

So the real 'unilateral' blunder of the US was not to ignore the UN and the Europeans, but to invade a country without local allies on the ground – except in the north, where Kurdish allies already ran a *de facto* government and so could make the transition to a fairly orderly new regime. The exiled Iraqis on whom the US relied for the rest of Iraq had no effective organisations on the ground, the Shi'a used theirs for their own purposes, and at least some Sunnis used theirs to kill Americans and Iraqi 'collaborators'. Most of Iraq would be an historic 'first' – a country pacified with no local allies. It seemed unlikely it could be done. The Provisional Authority and the Iraqi National Council had little legitimacy among Iraqis, and they had inadequate infrastructures for transitioning through pacification, to policing to effecting a stable, elected government.

This was not a 'mistake' of inadequate preparation, for (apart from the Kurds) there were no effective local allies available. Powerful Iraqis did not look to Americans to deliver them from Saddam Hussein. It had to be a largely unilateral invasion. Once it occurred, however, there was a major blunder – the abolition of the Iraqi army and Baathist political party and state. Most of the institutions that might

have been transformed into friendlier form were gone. The US attitude to democracy in the Middle East resembles its earlier attitude to capitalism in the former Soviet Union. Destroy the old regime and then democracy or markets will flourish naturally. Sociologists know that both democracy and markets actually require a strong institutional base which cannot be created by fiat or force.

The US declared 'victory' on 1 May 2003, at which point there had been 139 US casualties. By mid-April, 2004, the number had reached 720. Since May 2003, fatalities continued at a steady rate of between one or two a day (as I had predicted in my book *Incoherent Empire*), though with two big spikes in November 2003 and April 2004, when respectively 3 and over 4 were being killed per day.²² Far more Iraqis have been dying daily. The UN and international aid agencies had been targeted and mostly fled the country. At the beginning of 2004 US forces began a tactical retreat, withdrawing from dangerous environments into fewer but larger bases. This left the under-trained, under-armed Iraqi police force to take the brunt of the insurgent attacks. American losses initially began to decline a little, though less than hoped, while predictably Iraqi losses rocketed. The timetables for electoral caucuses, genuine elections and any genuine handover of power to an Iraqi administration were all delayed by the lack of order. The security situation is not currently improving. Indeed, in April 2004, the spread of insurgency to the Shi'a community, and the obvious signs of solidarity then between Sunni and Shi'a communities, is stretching US military resources to their limit. Even where there are fewer deaths, as in the south, most of the neighbourhood policing is actually done by the many rival paramilitaries formed by political parties, mosques, and tribal notables. In Basra, the main role of British troops is to keep relative peace between these militias. The US hopes desperately that somehow the various factions within the Kurdish, Sunni and Shia communities can brought into some minimal level of compromise, and that stability can be achieved in a few years. It is not inconceivable that this might happen – no-one can accurately predict, given lack of knowledge of rebel numbers and character. The apparent dearth of US intelligence is not reassuring, however, and at present it seems more likely that Shi'a and Sunni union will be achieved against US and British forces. The situation is much worse than the administration had envisaged beforehand – and getting still worse.

The US has long fought wars with a high regard for its own soldiers' lives and comforts, and has difficulty accepting losses. American acceptance of casualties in Iraq is aided by the administration's ban on reporting body-bags and funerals in the US, yet the war is now losing its initial popularity in the US. It also remains a largely unilateral enterprise and recent rebel tactics have been to target the foreign allies. The West European and other Powers, still smarting, refuse to commit many troops or substantial treasure. After the ghastly Madrid bombing, the new Spanish government has started plans to withdraw its forces, and the Turks, Pakistanis and Indians still drag their heels. The US is keen for the UN to come back in, though it is unlikely the UN would agree to share responsibility for reconstruction until security improves. The grants voted by the US and all other countries for Iraqi reconstruction up to the end of 2004 appear to total only about \$22 bn (\$18.5 bn from the US, \$3.5 bn from the rest), yet the World Bank had estimated that \$55 bn

²² Figures given in <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm>.

was required, and the US added on another \$21 bn for security needs. Other countries have also offered nearly \$10 bn in loans (mostly over a longer period) while the US Congress might only offer loans next time there is a budget request. Then Iraqis would have to pay for their own reconstruction. With what? Shall we take their oil in payment? Then the emperor would be without any clothes at all.

Invasions of Iran or Syria are impossible at present and would encounter similar problems in the future. 'Reformists' in Iraq and anti-Alawite factions in Syria are unlikely to openly seek Pentagon aid in their domestic squabbles, since this would only weaken their domestic support. North Korea differs, since there is a major local ally, South Korea, though since its capital lies within artillery range of Northern forces, it would be a reluctant ally in any attack. Once again, the real 'rivals' to the US are not Great Powers, but dissidents in the weak countries on which the US had hoped to effect regime-change.

Some would-be nation-states are disorderly, some fail altogether. But the US must not exaggerate its chances of being able to do much about them.²³ Even its own client states are unreliable, pursuing their own goals, often to the detriment of American policy goals – as has been the case for Israel, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. They are sovereign states, pursuing their own policies. In interventions inside nation-states, the US is a political pygmy. After showering clients with aid, it cannot control them, and it lacks the option of increasing controls on them with military measures, as previous Empires did. After inflicting military devastation on rogues, it cannot bring political order – as both Afghanistan and Iraq reveal. The Age of Empire has gone.

Ideological power

Underlying this is a sea-change in global ideologies. The Europeans (like almost all imperialists before them) were greatly helped by one important absence – nationalism. Conquered populations rarely shared a sense of a common collective identity. The Europeans called them 'Indians' and 'Africans', but they themselves did not, since their communities of attachment were much more local – regional, or tribal or sectarian. If they collaborated with the imperialists, they were not called traitors to the nation. Rather they were seen as advancing the interests of their local communities by sharing in the spoils of Empire. So, from Cortes securing the alliance of the Tlaxcalans against the Aztecs, to the British and French mobilising rival networks of Indian princes, to the Belgians ruling through Tutsi chieftains in Rwanda/Burundi, there was no great ideological obstacle to Empire. When natives rose up in rebellion, they confronted not just the Europeans, but also the Europeans' native allies.

The new imperialists and others say that American power is much greater than that of Britain or France in the nineteenth century. They are right if we compare individual countries. The US is more powerful than Britain was, much more power-

²³ Conservative critics of the new imperialism agree. See Gary T. Dempsey, 'Old Folly in a New Guise. Nation Building to Combat Terrorism', *Policy Analysis*, no. 429, 21 March 2002.

ful than France. But Britain and France were not go-it-alone imperialists. Despite fighting wars against each other, they were partners in a much broader so-called 'civilising mission' launched first by Europe, then by the West, on the rest of the world. The US joined in at the end of the nineteenth century in Cuba, the Philippines, China and elsewhere. This Western imperialism was much more formidable than the US is today, militarily, politically, economically, and especially ideologically. From the point of view of the rest of the world, Britain, France, Belgium, Russia, the United States and so on, all looked culturally the same. When viewed collectively, there was simply no escaping their power.

Culturally, the West represented modernity, progress, power. Its culture was so powerful that native elites all over the world knew they needed it even while they fought for liberation. The West also controlled the weapons of mass communication. In Africa the British, the French, the Belgians, the Portuguese, the Germans, the Italians all communicated easily with each other; while the 'Africans' in different regions of the continent could not easily communicate with each other, since they spoke many languages and few were literate. A Western communications monopoly prevented collective resistance at other than a local level. It also needed splits among the imperialists themselves for news of colonial atrocities to get out.

But by the twentieth century the Western ideal of rule by the people had spread to the colonies. Educating the natives for civil or military administration meant exposing them to literacy and to liberal, socialist and fascist notions of popular sovereignty. When Indian nationalists effectively adapted such theories to local conditions, British rule in India was finished. That was the end of the Age of Empires – though communism provided the Russian Empire with an additional lease of life, international comradeship delaying a little the appeals of nationalism.

Nationalism is now the world's dominant ideology. Some theories of globalisation assert that the nation-state dominated in the past, while transnational forces dominate today. True, before 1945 nation-states dominated Europe, but it was their Empires which dominated the world. Empires were replaced by nation-states between 1945 and the mid-1990s. Recent globalisation has globalised the nation-state. All 191 of the world's states now claim sovereignty over their territories 'in the name of the people', that is, they claim to be nation-states. They sit together in a body called 'the United Nations'. True, Europe has moved slightly beyond the nation-state, while some nations are disputed between rival ethnic, religious and regional factions, and some states do not have effective sovereignty over their territories. But they all aspire to sovereignty. Above all, there is no widespread ideology legitimising anyone else ruling over a nation-state. Since only 'the people' should rule, anti-imperialism is rampant across the world.

Complications arise where more than one collective identity compete as sources of nationalism and anti-imperialism. In the Middle East there are four: nationalism attached to a state (for example, Egyptian or Iraqi nationalism), pan-Arab nationalism, Islamism (popularly called fundamentalism), and Muslim sectarianism (mainly Sunni and Shi'a). The last two are not strictly nationalism, though they also provide powerful anti-imperialisms. So Iraq is only a fragile, divided nation-state. There is distrust between Shi'a and Sunni, between secularists, conservatives and Islamists, and between and within tribes and cities. But Iraqis distrust the alien occupiers even more. Iraq is for the Iraqis, they say, and so do Arabs and Muslims in general, for this is the dogma of nationalism everywhere.

To suppress resistance, the US must intensify militarism, as did previous Empires. 'Decimation' has entered modern languages after originating as the Roman practice of killing every tenth man or person in villages or towns which had revolted. Europeans – and Americans in the Philippines and Japanese in China – slaughtered civilians and burned villages and crops in similar retaliation. Thankfully, real empires have departed from the world. Americans did commit some atrocities in Vietnam, and doubtless there have been some in Iraq. The bombing and shelling of Falluja in April 2004 is, I believe, a war crime, predictably producing hundreds of civilian casualties. But the US cannot go rampaging freely through the 'Sunni Triangle' as the British Empire would have done in the nineteenth century when faced with comparable opposition. Villages would have been razed, crops burned, and men, women and children deliberately killed to 'set an example' to others. Americans caused the deaths of an estimated 250,000 Filipinos in their last true imperial venture in the early twentieth century, without causing much of an outcry. Global ideologies have changed since then to embrace ideals of racial equality and universal human rights. America claims to bring stability, freedom and democracy to Iraq, not repression. It must live up to this claim, not least in the eyes of the American public. Its imperial predecessors promised only 'civilization', order imposed on people who were termed 'savages', 'barbarians', 'heathens' or 'lower races' (Americans coined the term 'gooks' for Filipinos). America must do better today, but with fewer resources.

Today, 'weapons of mass communication' have also levelled the playing-field, communicating such values as nationalism, anti-imperialism, racial equality and human rights across the South of the world. Literacy and the media are global. Resistance to imperialism and its alleged atrocities are beamed by Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya to 35 million Arabs, and increasingly to others. Such weapons are no longer controlled by the imperialists. Indeed, once things started going wrong in Iraq, the Bush administration could no longer control the media even in the US. Now that the bombing has stopped, Iraqi rebel atrocities are worse than the Americans'. But atrocities are interpreted within broader ideological frames. Westerners retain traces of old civilisational and racial ideologies in which they tend to see Iraqi rebels as less 'civilised' than Western soldiers. But in other regions, and especially in Muslim countries, frames of anti-imperial struggles against foreigners, infidels and Crusaders generate contrary stereotypes. In this ideological struggle, the US possesses the advantage only in its own homeland, and among a declining number of allies.

America does possess some potential ideological advantages. It has long represented values of material plenty, individual freedom, and democracy to the world. The world tended in the second half of the twentieth century to see the US and not Europe as the exemplar of modernity. America also has the world's most powerful media which sometimes express these values. The US was the first to develop efficient mass-production of culture, and Hollywood and US television networks retain a global lead. But since over half Hollywood's profits now come from abroad, it has countered the stiling effects of sub-titles and dubbing by reducing the number of words per minute. Narrative drive, action, sex and violence do not communicate many values. The major shows of the US television networks depict private life in an overwhelmingly apolitical and anodyne way, reinforcing the style of the commercials, which now occupy 22 minutes per hour of air-time. TV

sales abroad declined as consumers turned to locally-produced shows. A 2001 survey of 60 countries revealed that seven of their top ten programmes were locally produced. 'The worldwide television market is growing', said the president of Walt Disney Television, 'but America's place in it is declining'. The US share of the world-wide web declined from a half to a third during the 1990s. In 2003, 32 per cent of Internet sites are American, 28 per cent European and 26 per cent Asian – Northern trilateralism again.²⁴ American media convey commercial, material and individual-level values more than directly political values.

Global annual surveys indicated that the world loves the values of democracy, freedom and human rights and quite likes the American version of them. It also approves of globalisation and free markets. But it likes 'Americans' more than 'the United States', and there has been steadily rising criticism of US government policies. The US is accused of worsening inequality, poverty and the environment. Majorities deplore American unilateralism and militarism, especially disliking US policy toward Israel and Iraq. In 2003 even Israelis tended to see the US as favouring them rather than the Palestinians, and only Americans out of all the countries surveyed believed US policy was even-handed. Even support for the war on terrorism declined. The 2003 report said 'the bottom has fallen out of support for America in most of the Muslim world'. Majorities in seven out of the eight Muslim countries surveyed (including Kuwait) said the US might become a military threat to their country.²⁵ The US is losing the ideological struggle in the Muslim world. Suicide bombers killing Americans are more often seen as freedom-fighters than as evil-doers.

The new imperialists expected that Americans would be greeted as liberators in Iraq. Yet US policies alienated most Iraqis, both as nationalists and as Muslims. The administration's war against terrorism continues to discriminate against Muslims. The President blatantly and personally sides with Israel against the Palestinians, as do many neo-cons (see Frum and Perle's book for many egregious examples). Ten thousand Muslims were killed in Afghanistan for no significant improvement in the country. The new imperialists told a stream of lies about Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction and terrorists. Iraqis suspected the US wanted their oil, not without reason, since the 2001 'Cheney Report' on US energy needs identified Saddam as America's main enemy and urged the US to use all necessary means against him, 'including military intervention'.²⁶ Arab TV channels daily beamed all such knowledge to Iraqis, enveloped in graphic video footage of Muslim suffering. Then Iraqis experienced it themselves. In 2003 the US probably killed over 15,000 Iraqis in six months, a rate of killing Saddam had not matched since 1991. Frightened US troops

²⁴ Suzanne Kapner, 'Pax Americana? Not in world TV market', *The Straits Times* (Singapore), 3 January 2003; 'Faiblit la domination de l'Internet de la part des US', <www.GSMBOX.fr>, 8 June 2000.

²⁵ The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *What the World Thinks in 2002* (Washington, DC: The Pew Center for the People and the Press), Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2002 and Views of a Changing World, 2003, both found at <www.astridonline.it/Cartella-p/What-the-W/>; cf. also The German Marshall Fund/Council on Foreign Relations poll, <www.worldviews.org/>; 'How the Japanese, South Koreans and Chinese view the post 9–11 world and US military action', *The Harris Poll* # 63, 26 December 2001.

²⁶ 'Strategic Energy Policy Challenges for the 21st Century', *Report of an Independent Task Force*, <www.rice.edu/projects/baker/Pubs/workingpapers/cfrbipp_energy/energytf.htm>.

brandished lethal weapons, shouting 'Stop!' in English at check-points – symbolising their near-complete ideological failure to communicate to Iraqis.

In the Age of Nationalism, aiding the US after it has invaded your country opens you to the charge of treason. The nations of the world are now held responsible for their own destinies. Outside intervention must be justified by extreme conditions, as the UN Charter states; and intervention must be quick and beneficent. This is a higher standard than the Roman or British Empires could have met. The first years of their conquests were usually mired in the blood of civilian casualties, but this mattered little to most of the world. Today the world's dominant ideologies, carried through mass media, contradict any imperialism. That is the fundamental ideological problem confronting the new imperialists. Even many in the supposed imperialist camp lack heart and soul for the task of repression, as Ferguson has also emphasised. This brings a contradiction between US military and ideological power. American military power converts the American Dream of peace, democracy and plenty into a Phantom, disappearing as foreigners draw closer to it.

Conclusion

This builds up to a somewhat mixed metaphor. The US is a military giant, an economic back-seat driver, a political schizophrenic and an ideological phantom. The result is a mess of contradictions, at first an incoherent empire – then a failed one.

The administration publicly pretends that everything is on course – at least until the November 2004 election. What either Bush or Kerry would do after the election remains anyone's guess, since Iraq has been converted into a quagmire which cannot be drained quickly. New terrorists created by US policy moved into Iraq, converted by the US into a failed state. Despite massive international cooperation which struck down many existing terrorists, new, younger terrorists struck in Casablanca, Riyadh and Iraq itself. Their presence is openly acknowledged by US generals and administrators in Iraq. Perversely, the Bush administration claims that this is proof of links between Al Qaeda and Saddam's supporters. Indeed, it probably is, now. But there were no links before the US invaded – except for the presence of Musab al-Zarqawi with the Islamist movement Ansar al-Islam in the area of Iraq controlled by the Kurds not Saddam. Now Zaqawi is reported to be freely moving across Iraq's borders recruiting young suicide bombers. This is serious blow-back – the creation of international terrorists attacking the US.²⁷

On WMDs the impact is murkier. The North Koreans seem to have concluded that Saddam was invaded because he lacked WMDs, so they appeared to rush more quickly to acquire them while the US was bogged down in Iraq. The US then began to revert to the Clinton policy of offering inducements to North Korea to disarm, while also hoping that China would put pressure on North Korea to disarm. In late

²⁷ In his testimony to Congress on 25 February 2004, CIA Director George Tenet admitted that the terrorist threat to the United States had broadened since a year ago, involving many more terrorist organisations and a new generation of young recruits.

February 2004, North Korea was offered a deal of economic aid in return for a pledge to freeze and then dismantle nuclear weapons facilities. But to save face for the Bush administration, the offer came from South Korea. North Korea thought the offer was inadequate, and the elaborate negotiating ritual continues, perhaps buying time for WMD development. This also seems to be true of Iran, where Europe and the UN are also involved in multilateral rituals. The Bush administration proclaims that Iran and Libya have been cowed by US actions, though this remains unclear. Libya has indeed renounced WMDs, though it was in 1999 that Libya first made such an offer, while multilateral negotiations between the US, Britain, France and Libya have been proceeding for 12 years. Yet by early 2004 it became clear that Saddam in Iraq did not have WMDs so could not proliferate them, while Professor Khan in Pakistan did have them and did proliferate them.

What would improve policy? While success in Iraq looks unlikely and even extraction from it looks difficult, it is easier to shift back to a more effective policy of anti-WMD proliferation, offering carrots (security guarantees and economic inducements) as well as sticks, and this has already happened toward North Korea and Pakistan. Anti-terrorist policy would have to make a more radical shift, out from under the straitjacket term of 'terrorism'. The US must distinguish between national and international terrorists, and also accept the moral equivalence of terrorism and state terrorism. Administration statements routinely name 'Al-Qaeda, Hamas and Hezbollah' as the terrorist enemy, and this is the ubiquitous hostile triad identified in the book of its former officials, Frum and Perle. But of the three only Al-Qaeda is attacking Americans. International terrorists like Al Qaeda aim at international targets, including Americans and other Westerners. They are enemies of America, and must be fought. But luckily they are much more exposed and easier to eliminate. They are émigrés, operating in alien environments, and their bombings usually kill more locals than Westerners. They have killed the citizens of over 80 countries, and so the governments of over 80 countries are cooperating in tracking them down.

But national terrorists, like Hamas, Hezbollah, the Moro Liberation Front in the Philippines, and Chechen and Kashmiri groups, only attack those they identify as their national oppressor. They are protected amid a 'national liberation struggle' and a supportive people. In turn, their oppressor relies on a usually equally atrocious state terrorism to fight them. Since national liberation struggles are very deeply rooted in the age of nation-states and nationalism, only rarely have they been completely eliminated in modern times. It is unwise of the US to attempt this, since it will likely fail and bring blow-back in the form of terrorists shifting to international targets and attacking Americans. Here the US can bring its power to bear in pressuring both the national terrorists and their state terrorist opponents into settlement of their dispute – as, for example, in putting equal pressure on Sharon and Arafat, the legitimate leaders of their sides.

Additionally, the US might give more generous aid to Muslim countries to help repair the harm the new imperialism has done to US interests there. More generally, a greater commitment against world poverty and disease would help, as would a realisation that effective economic policies across the world must be tailored by locals to their own distinctive portfolios of resources. The world also needs more positive collective action against environmental degradation. All of this would aid the spread of genuine democracy. This would be the genuine version of a longer-term humanitarian interventionism.

It would be over-optimistic to expect the US to do all of this. Perhaps it is more likely that, as is intermittently the case in history, human folly will continue to generate more terrorism, more Christian/ Muslim confrontation, and a more insecure world. Yet some reaction against the disastrous American imperial policies might be expected. They need not leave too harmful a legacy, for the realities of global power remain. The US would remain the global economic leader and holder of the reserve currency. It would remain the global political leader in supposedly 'multilateral' organisations. It might regain global ideological leadership by reasserting traditional American virtues. It is, of course, the only Power capable of projecting military power around the world. Any vigorous, concerted, global action in any of these policy directions requires American leadership. Little constructive can be done without it. The new imperialists pressured and then ignored their Great Power rivals, but they did not do them actual harm. Nor have they done harm to most countries of the world. If the US shifts policy, they will accept its leadership again, though some will do so grudgingly. Informal, indirect, imperial powers will return, with at least partial hegemony soon following.

In the long run, relative American decline will continue. Its economic power has already declined relative to Europe and Japan, and will soon decline relative to China and India. Some of these may become politically and even militarily more assertive. Then the world might return to a version of nineteenth century world order, now characterised by a leading Power (the US), embedded in a multilateral Concert of Powers and a transnational capitalism – boosted perhaps by other transnational actors generated by the present phase of globalisation.

Hobbesian theorists are wrong. International order does not need a single Leviathan, and it does not have one now. The world rarely had a Leviathan in the past. Stable nation-states, now spread out from the North through all continents, are now very orderly in their relations with each other. They have been disciplined by the devastation of modern weaponry, by their integration into a global economy, and by their ideological acceptance of a narrower range of values, extending from liberal to social democracy and markets. The US offers military protection now only to Israel and Taiwan, and to a lesser extent South Korea, plus one or two others. If any moderately stable nation-state became 'rogue-like', the US could use force to devastate it, but not usually to reconstruct it.

In the South there are many unstable, divided or 'failed' states, or states suffering under a repressive dictator. They might benefit from a Leviathan. But could the US instal alternative viable regimes? The cases of humanitarian intervention named above all contained a viable alternative local regime, already prepared and capable of running the country. Indeed, dissident Khmer Rouge, Bosnian Muslim, Albanian, and Tutsi forces were already fighting on the ground – as were Kurds in Iraq. They were all nationalist insurgents, fighting for control over a nation-state, either the existing one or a smaller one. None of these viable regimes were very democratic, but then the notion of outsiders marching in to instal democracy is absurd, unless the natives want this and have experience of it – as Germans, Italians and Japanese had in 1945. With such viable nationalist allies the US (and on a smaller scale, Britain, France and others) could intervene usefully. Without them, the US can devastate evil-doers but not bring order afterwards. Ferguson suggests that Liberians might like to become a US colony, though he believes that, sadly, the US lacks the

will to attempt it.²⁸ Since it is of minimal strategic value, Liberia is not a good test case of American will. But the main obstacles lie not among the Americans but the natives.

Recent experience should have weakened the new imperialists' resolve. There are some signs that the power struggle between the Pentagon and the State Department has begun to tilt toward State for the first time since 9–11. Rumsfeld's own doubts were leaked in a memo of 24 October 2003. He confessed he did not 'know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror', asking whether we 'need to fashion a broad, integrated plan to stop the next generation of terrorists', adding that Afghanistan and Iraq 'will be a long, hard slog'.²⁹ Yet the continuing policy of pressuring the Palestinians but not Sharon is still worsening chaos there, worsening Arab and Muslim alienation from the US, and increasing the flow of terrorists. Neo-conservative rhetoric foolishly confuses 'Islamism' and 'radicalism' in Muslim communities with terrorism (this is especially clear in the Frum and Perle book). Actually, few Islamists or radicals support terrorism, but maybe the US will persuade them to! This is acquiring the look of a Huntington-style 'conflict of civilisations', which it was certainly not in its origins. Few recent foreign policies have been so counterproductive – though I am a strong believer in the sociological theory that societies are ruled by folly. But I hope (more than assume) that beneath the bluster, the administration feels somewhat chastened, and is unlikely to attempt imperial measures against other 'rogues'. It has been thwarted not by Great Power rivals, but by relatively few Muslims from weak, unhappy countries, riven by internal conflicts. The wretched of the earth have made the New American Empire still-born.

²⁸ In *Colossus*, pp. 198–9

²⁹ Talon News, 24 October 2003, 'Text of Rumsfeld Memo to Senior Pentagon Officials', <www.gopusa.com/news/2003/october/1024_memo_textp.shtml>.