

AMERICA AS EMPIRE: GLOBAL LEADER OR ROGUE POWER?

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We designed this conference to be one of the first to reflect upon the implications of the invasion of Iraq, for it is clear that the international landscape is far different now than it was before the war. There is a good measure of confusion about what exactly this event portends and how the world community should move forward. It is as if we are experiencing an eclipse of all we thought we had learned, and we are now unsure of how long the darkness will last
5 before we see the light again.

I must make one point at the beginning, and that is that I speak with a strong political point of view. I speak as an American who has not been so disturbed by his government's policies since the Vietnam war. The logic and circumstances are of course completely different with Iraq but the hubris and the overextension are the same; consequently, we will reap the compensatory whirlwind that the fates always seem to apply on these occasions.
10 Therefore the intent of this paper, as well as my forthcoming book, America as Empire, is to stimulate debate. I believe Americans especially, but also the international community generally, need to raise the quality of the dialogue about the nature of America's relationship with the world at this critical juncture in the history of both.

I would like to begin by offering three observations that I hope might bring some illumination to the larger issue of what kind of global governance regime we must shape for the century before us. The first is that the invasion of Iraq
15 had very little to do with Saddam Hussein. He was an occasion, not a reason. I agree very much with Thomas Friedman in his recent column in the New York Times, that it was the attack of September 11th that was the "real reason" the United States went into Iraq. As Friedman put it, removing the Taliban from Afghanistan was not enough. America needed to go out into the Arab world and clobber somebody else, and Saddam was it. All other reasons were of secondary importance, especially the issue of weapons of mass destruction, something the world community
20 suspects and which the various hearings will eventually clarify and confirm.

This raises the second observation, that even as 9/11 brought into global focus the issue of terrorism, the invasion of Iraq just as dramatically brought into focus the overwhelming power of the United States. I believe this was the deeper intention of the war, to signal to all the world that in the aftermath of the vulnerability experienced during 9/11, the United States is still invincible. As the President stated in the National Security Statement of September 2002, the
25 U.S. can and will act preemptively anywhere and at any time it deems appropriate to secure its national interests.

This signal was received loud and clear, which, paradoxically, raised another fact for the whole world to observe, that the Bush Administration is significantly out of step with the majority of the world community. The invasion of Iraq in defiance of overwhelming opposition, both in world public opinion and in the UN Security Council, has produced a situation in which many have concluded that America, the global leader, has become America, the rogue imperium. In
30 a strange synchronicity, America is reaching the point of global dominion and simultaneously triggering a global opprobrium for the U.S.

This is of course the way of empires, to be hated when they exert dominion. But this has happened to the United States in an astonishingly short period of time, mostly co-terminus with the behavior and attitudes of the Bush Administration and most dramatically in the aftermath of 9/11.
35 Global polling, most recently by the Pew Foundation and BBC Television, indicates that while people generally respect and like the United States and Americans, negative perceptions are on the rise virtually all over the world, with the exception of Israel, where positive ratings for Bush and America are at an all time high. But elsewhere this is not the case. Negative suspicions now constitute the prevailing conventional wisdom for a majority of people outside the United States about the United States. At the heart of this concern is the evaluation that the Bush Administration is
40 using its power to destabilize the world militarily but is not compensating for this by building up the world constructively or being empathetic culturally.

This leads to the third observation. As a Jungian, I would observe that America is a highly complex nation and is most comprehensively described as an antinomy, meaning something comprised of internally consistent but mutually exclusive truths. On the one hand, the United States has been a beacon of light for the world, representing freedom,
45 equality and the opportunity to fulfill our deepest human aspirations. This is the deepest imprint America has on the world.

On the other hand, the United States has been motivated by the acquisition of power, which Carl Jung taught us is

psychologically the gateway to our shadow side. The United States has not just emerged as a world power from nowhere. It is a mission it has pursued since its inception. In acquiring near total power, we have made many
50 comprises along the way. Particularly during the Cold War, we made numerous alliances and supported a host of corrupt and authoritarian regimes all over the world.

The highly militarized response to September 11 has manifested once again this shadow aspect of American history and politics and thus we are being experienced by the larger world as aggressive, ruthless, cynical and dogmatic. This is what the historian Walter Russell Meade calls the “Jacksonian” tradition in American history, named after President
55 Andrew Jackson, whose Administration was characterized by fighting the Indians and taming the West during the 1840s. It was a time when the world was cast in black and white and the aim was to defeat the enemy.

Meade also notes other traditions: the “Hamiltonian,” interested in commerce and trade; the “Jeffersonian,” committed to small government and human rights; and the “Wilsonian,” heralding world changing political ideals. All of these traditions conjoin to produce the totality of the American political economy, but right now the Jacksonian is in the
60 ascendancy and will dominate the American polity until the impulse generated by 9/11 has run its course.

In thinking about America, therefore, it is essential to hold simultaneously its light and dark dimensions, for they are inseparably intertwined. America’s mission to inspire the world and its compulsion to exercise dominion over the world are both deeply embedded in its psyche and soul. For now, let us just say that the message back from the world to the Bush Administration is that America should be more than just a sheriff because the world is certainly more than
65 a bunch of terrorists and a posse.

This observation about national multi-dimensionality is not simply aimed at the United States. Europe has provided an extraordinary amount of light to the world. The Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment all arose from Europe and served as the crucible for our modernity. But the twentieth century was also the bloodiest in history, with two world wars, fascism, communism, and the holocaust. These, too, all emanated from Europe.

70 The point here is that in analyzing history we must honor the complexity of life and the fact that nations, like individuals, are comprised of light and dark dimensions. At different times and for different reasons, the light and dark aspects are expressed in specific and changing configurations. This is both the greatness of what it means to be human as well as an expression of our passion.

So for the Bush Administration to be demanding a more-than- full measure of vengeance for an injury suffered, while
75 at the same time consolidating American global supremacy, is rather normal in the over-all scheme of things. It is just that it is so fundamentally uninspiring to be committing such counter-productive acts for such outdated motives at a time of such momentous opportunity in world affairs. In the flow of civilization, nations are more crippled than perfect, often preferring delusions of grandeur to the humility of pragmatism. This is what makes our experience of history more a pathos to be endured than an upward journey taken with ease.

80 Having made these observations, I would like to step back and dwell briefly on the magnitude of this moment within the context of world history. For the last five thousand years, beginning in Mesopotamia with the empire of Sargon the Great around 2,300 B.C., the world has been a battleground for competing empires rising and falling in a cacophony of complicated competitions that, beginning about five hundred years ago saw European powers spilling out from Europe and colonizing most of the rest of the world.

85 These imperial competitions were superceded about fifty years ago by the bi-polar rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Twelve years ago, the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving only the United States as a global power. So history has gone from a myriad of powers, to control by European powers, to two superpowers, to only one power.

The United States now polices the world through five global military commands; it maintains more than a million troops in over 650 bases around the globe; it deploys carrier battle groups in every ocean; it drives the wheels of
90 global culture, trade, politics, technology and finance; and it is now consolidating military control over the Fertile Crescent, perhaps the most strategically important region in the world.

I would venture to say that part of the confusion and resentment expressed about the United States is that we are dealing with an unprecedented but overwhelming phenomenon, and we are unsure exactly how to think about it, especially since 9/11. I think this is because we were all lulled into believing, with Fukuyama, that when the Cold War
95 ended we had somehow reached the “end of history,” and empires and other nasty things would no longer occur. But with the highly militarized foreign policy formation of the Bush Administration, to say nothing about the general state of the world, we have been shocked to discover that here history is again and it has been our lack of preparedness for this that constitutes a major part of our predicament.

This is why I assert that the United States is an empire: it is a continuation of history as we have known it, defining
100 empire as it classically has been defined: the control of one nation over an aggregate of nations. Through its own force and through mediating institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, along with numerous

other bilateral and multilateral institutions, the U.S. now controls more nations in more ways than any nation in history.

There are many things that one could say about this issue, both in terms of what came together to provide the United States with this magnitude of power, and about the policies and intents of the Bush Administration in particular. But in the few minutes I have remaining, I would like to dwell on one issue that I believe is of overriding importance.

Empires rise and fall. Having reached its zenith, the only real question before the United States is how long it will last before it, too, falls, for fall it surely will. This raises in turn a deeper question about the durability of imperial power. The last imperial attempt in Europe, the Nazis, lasted a mere twelve years. The British and French maintained their empires for just about 200. Rome lasted a thousand.

What is it that constitutes durable imperial power? This is the question I would like to ask because it not only affects the United States but the entire world over which the United States now has dominion. Now and for the foreseeable future, American power and the question of global governance have become and will remain inseparably intertwined.

Since Rome set the record for durability, it is upon Rome that I would like to briefly reflect. Like all great nations, Rome had its own peculiar interplay of light and dark dimensions, well known to most of you. What may not be so well known is the fact that great historians such as Edward Gibbons and Will Durant point to the period of 98 –180 A.D. as the longest period of continuous good governance in the history of the world. This is a rather damning indictment of our contemporary democratic governance, if you think about it, that modern historians point to a time long ago when emperors ruled, not democracy, as the period when the people enjoyed the greatest benefit of sustained good governance.

It was during this period that three things came together so effectively that the natural response then, as with today, was to name it pax romana, a term actually coined during that time. The Roman legions were at their highest state of effectiveness and thus the empire reached its greatest extent, the avenues of commerce within the empire were open and peaceful and thus goods and services flowed throughout the realm, and, most importantly, the emperors universalized Roman law and built robust institutions that were perceived by the governed as just and fair.

This elegance of governance came to an end when Marcus Aurelius turned over power to his son Commodus, and the decline and fall of Rome then began, but for over eight decades, the world experienced a succession of five emperors whose sole object of power was the good governance of the realm. They understood that true mastery was expressed through law and durable power ensured through consistent stewardship of the realm. The world has not seen power at the magnitude of Rome's until the emergence of the United States. The question before us is whether we will see a similar magnitude of good governance, especially since we now have democratic institutions, which the Americans have done so much to pioneer.

This question can only be answered by measuring American responses against the great challenges of the day, which, to my mind, boil down fundamentally to two. I agree entirely with Jean Francois Rischard, that the major problems facing the world today are global in scope, requiring collective attention and coordinated response, but that our prevailing institutions are incapable of effective response. This is the fundamental challenge confronting humanity today, the inability of the prevailing system to address human needs. Because we are not taking up this task, says Rischard, the planet is quite literally on a collision course with itself.

The second major challenge is the phenomenon of globalization itself. Globalization is an integrating phenomenon that is also democratizing power all over the world. The attack of 9/11 was only possible because of globalization, for essentially what was occurring was that the world's superpower was being confronted by a super-empowered individual and his voluntary network. As Alpesh Chokshi put it, we are witnessing the privatization of foreign policy.

The fact that bin Laden is still at large and Al Qaeda is still operative is an extraordinary statement not only about the democratization of power that globalization represents but also about the inability of states alone, no matter how strong and how zealous, to deal effectively with the super-empowered individuals and networks that globalization is now making possible.

The irony of the situation is that the crisis of the international order is exaggerating American power even as it simultaneously undermines it. The United States has become the strongest nation in the world precisely at the moment when history is moving beyond the centrality of the nation state. This presents the United States with an extraordinary dilemma, unique among empires. If it simply seeks to pursue its own self interest, it violates the basic integrating trend that globalization represents. If it unilaterally seeks to assert power through military might, it contravenes the increasingly civilizational context for world affairs, that cultural norms and religious traditions are of far deeper significance to people than national structures or Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

This sharp divergence between deep historical trends, moving in one direction, and the current direction of U.S. power, moving in the opposite direction, explains why the U.S. seems to be gaining in power, but losing in influence.

This is of serious concern because history has repeatedly shown that power without influence does not long endure.

For a moment contrast the situation today with what happened fifty years ago, at a similar time of crisis and turbulence in human affairs. In that crisis, World War Two, American leadership rose to true greatness and ushered in a new historical era, gaining for America both unprecedented power and extensive influence and for the world the basis for a post colonial international system. President Roosevelt led the allies to victory and initiated the creation of the United Nations. President Truman implemented the Marshall Plan, established the Breton Woods institutions, and founded NATO.

Between them, these two American leaders dealt decisively with a crisis and turned it into an extraordinary opportunity. They used the national sovereignty of the United States to bring victory in war and shape to a new world order based on international law and a matrix of international institutions. In so doing, they replicated what the leaders of Rome attained, the combination of a strong military, proactive economic structures and the establishment of governing institutions generally perceived as just and fair.

Unfortunately for both America and the world, this level of leadership has not been forthcoming from the White House during the present crisis in human affairs. It is almost as if the United States has become its opposite from what it was after the Second World War. Then we were magnanimous; now we are vindictive. Then we built a host of international institutions and proclaimed a new world order; now we are withdrawing from and destabilizing international institutions and treaty regimes in favor of "coalitions of the willing." And then we were perceived as liberators and peace makers; now we are perceived as occupiers and warmongers.

Thus the wide divergence between American power and the aspirations of the international community, and thus the increasing turbulence of global affairs. We are in a very dangerous time.

So, what to do? Paradoxically, while the U.S. certainly is the dominant national state, it is not the only superpower. There are in fact two superpowers but the other superpower is not another nation, it is the very group from which America is so dramatically diverging: the world public. This is a global social phenomenon that has been evolving for most of the last century, catalyzed by a series of social movements in the North and West and struggles for national liberation and human development in the East and South. It is neither cohesive nor directed but is increasingly making its voice heard in world affairs. Its voice is largely expressed through civil society, the increasing well organized power of non governmental organizations, the corporate sector, the religious communities, academia, and many in the governmental sector.

If you think about it, the lead up to the war in Iraq was significant in the sense that it was the first war argued before the court of international opinion and hotly debated in the Security Council before it actually started. In this sense, it was an achievement for global democracy. People are now aware as never before that politics matter and that certain ideals must be exemplified by political leaders for them to maintain international credibility.

The fact that America went to war even though it lost the public as well as the Security Council debate has left great fissures in the UN system, the transatlantic alliance and in the fundamental relationship between America and the world over which it now exercises dominion. While this is certainly of concern and needs remediation, it is also an important statement about the capacity of the international community to make up its own mind and withstand manipulation and coercion.

Both the magnitude of American power and the increasing influence and skepticism of the international public present America with a moment of choice. If it is to long endure, it must concentrate on the durability of its power, which means enhancing rather than defying the megatrends that are shaping our world. In an integrating world, the United States must lead in the building of integrating institutions, especially at the global level where increasingly human affairs are taking place.

These would include establishing the global issue networks Rischard suggests and the extranational institutions Georges Berthoin advocates and which have been so instrumental in shaping the European Union, essentially networks and institutions that bring communities, interests groups and nations together at higher levels of synthesis and collaboration. Above all, the United States must commit itself to enabling the international community to more effectively solve global problems.

It is my belief that if the United States would affirm rather than oppose these kinds of measures, it would find an entire world ready to begin collaborating. I believe the world is weary of conflict and ready for inspirational leadership and audacious action. People are ready to eliminate HIVAIDS, they are ready to get to grips with global warming, they are ready to eliminate poverty. People are yearning for somebody from somewhere to bring about a more equitable and effective management of the global system. To simply be chasing the shadows of terrorists and consolidating military hegemony in the face of the totality of our challenges is to completely miss the point of world affairs in this first decade of the new millennium.

210 This is to say that I believe there would be enormous international support for a serious effort to envision and build a world that works for more people than it does today. It is eminently possible, even if exceedingly improbable. The mechanisms to solve virtually all our problems are well known to us. We are only lacking the social imagination and the political will. What is needed is catalytic leadership, and the world could turn. If it does not come, catastrophe will compel us, sooner or later.

215 If the United States would rise to great leadership, as it did so powerfully fifty years ago, building the global institutions and mechanisms needed for the effective management of the global system, then the light of America's founding vision would once again inform the application of its power. World aspirations and American interests could conjoin to produce a global renaissance of effective governance, democracy and prosperity.

How such a transposition of values will come about, I do not know, but that it will come is as certain as the changing
220 of the seasons and the ebb and flow of the tides. Warts and all, the United States is still the best candidate to lead the world. It only a matter of time before America comes back into alignment with its light side and the principles that have always made it a beacon of hope in a desperate world. The international community can aid that return by standing firm in its commitment, as the European Union is, that history demands integration at deeper and deeper levels of complexity and that sovereignty must continually be renegotiated within a community framework.

225 I believe the United States could be the last empire, for when new American leadership emerges, unconstrained by the demands for the vengeance September 11 compelled, and working with a well informed world public and a strong and vibrant European Union, all parties could build the integrating institutions necessary for the effective management of the global system. American power could then naturally be superseded by democratically constituted global mechanisms that could preclude the emergence of any further national empires. Informed by the light by which it was
230 founded, American power could be used to actually end history as we have known it by making obsolete the need for empire.

Central to what must be done is the active exploration of what extranationality means in our emerging global context. Equally central is to begin work immediately on our critical global challenges by forming global issue networks to deal with them over the long term. We must come together to share our distributed intelligence about what constitutes
235 the emerging new operating reality, and how complexity and risk assessment must be judged in a world slightly out of control, with more variables than ever before, and with regulating structures of increasing fragility.

We have entered a brave new world, one in which complexity dominates, change is constant, and our entire world, from planet to people, is so interconnected that the "butterfly effect" of chaos theory is now the daily norm. In the face of this, the very definition of progress, success and survivability must be redefined. Out beyond the paralysis of our
240 institutions are models of governance that honor diversity and the creativity that diversity unleashes. Only these contain the solutions we seek.

If there could be a movement toward these goals by people of good will around the world, a new modeling of the future could be established, one that would, over time, take root and grow to the degree to which the world community takes control of its own destiny and begins to build the kind of world it wants. There is perhaps no time in history
245 more opportune to the admonition of President Eisenhower, that "when the people lead, the governments are sure to follow."

It is time for the people to lead.

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