

Dreams of Empire
By Tony Judt, United States Military

Review

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America's Inadvertent Empire
by William E. Odom and Robert Dujarric
Yale University Press, 285 pp., \$30.00

The Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of American Empire
edited by Andrew J. Bacevich
Ivan R. Dee, 271 pp., \$28.95; \$16.95 (paper)

Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East
by Rashid Khalidi
Beacon, 192 pp., \$23.00

The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America
by John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge
Penguin, 400 pp., \$25.95

Empire
by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri
Harvard University Press, 478 pp., \$45.00; \$19.95 (paper)

Multitude
by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri
Penguin, 427 pp., \$27.95

The New Imperialism
by David Harvey
Oxford University Press, 253 pp., \$22.00

Fear: The History of a Political Idea
by Corey Robin
Oxford University Press, 316 pp., \$28.00

A New World Order
by Anne-Marie Slaughter
Princeton University Press, 341 pp., \$29.95

1.
Talk of "empire" makes Americans distinctly uneasy. This is odd. In its westward course the young republic was not embarrassed to suck virgin land and indigenous peoples into the embrace of Thomas Jefferson's "empire for liberty." Millions of American immigrants made and still make their first acquaintance with the US through New York, "the Empire State." From Monroe to Bush, American presidents have not hesitated to pronounce doctrines whose extraterritorial implications define imperial authority and presume it: there is nothing self-effacing about that decidedly imperious bird on the Presidential Seal. And yet, though the rest of the world is under

no illusion, in the United States today there is a sort of wishful denial. We don't want an empire, we aren't an empire—or else if we are an empire, then it is one of a kind.

This nervous uncertainty has given rise to an astonishing recent spate of books and essays. Some of these display a charming insouciance. America, write William E. Odom and Robert Dujarric, is an empire of a new type, unipolar, based on ideology rather than territorial control, voluntary in membership, and economically advantageous to all countries within it.[1] Others—like the essays collected by Andrew Bacevich in *The Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of American Empire*—are a curious amalgam of military hubris and cultural anxiety: they dutifully document both America's truly awesome military reach and the widespread national uncertainty about what to do with it.

The United States is different from other countries. But as an imperial power it is actually quite conventional and even familiar. True, modern America eschews territorial acquisitions. But that is irrelevant. Like the British at the height of their imperial majesty, the US prefers to get its way by example, pressure, and influence. Lord Palmerston's dictum—"trade without rule where possible, trade with rule where necessary"—has been applied by Washington with even greater success. Whereas the British were constrained (after some initial reluctance) to exercise formal—and costly—imperium over whole sub-continent, the US has hitherto perfected the art of controlling foreign countries and their resources without going to the expense of actually owning them or ruling their subjects.

Even the story that America tells about its overseas initiatives is hardly original. Like the Victorians, Americans readily suppose that what is demonstrably to our advantage—free trade, democracy—must therefore serve everyone's interest. Like the French, we count ourselves blessed with laws and institutions whose incontrovertible superiority places a duty upon us to make them universally available. Europeans who cringe when George W. Bush describes America as "the greatest force for good in history" —or promises to export democracy to the Middle East because American values "are right and true for every person in every society"[2] — would do well to recall France's "civilizing mission," or the White Man's Burden.

They should recall, too, that empires are not all bad. They bring protection, especially to minorities. Joseph Roth correctly foresaw that Jews above all would have cause to rue the fall of the Habsburgs. And it is not by chance that the Abkhazian people trapped in independent Georgia dream today of returning to the anonymous security of the Russian imperial fold: there are many worse things than subjection to a distant imperial capital. Empires often bring modern institutions, too—an ambiguous economic benefit but not without other advantages. And some imperial powers just do have a better track record than others. There is little to say in defense of the Italian overseas empire, much less the Belgian. But if we apply the felicific calculus to the history of American foreign involvement, we shall find a lot to applaud.

Nonetheless, even if it could be demonstrated beyond a doubt that American hegemony really was a net good for everyone, its putative beneficiaries in the rest of the world would still reject it. Whether they would be acting against their own best interests is beside the point—a consideration not always well understood even by proponents of "soft power." [3] As Raymond Aron once observed, it is a denial of the experience of our century (the twentieth) to suppose that men will sacrifice their passions for their interests. And it is above all in its reluctance to grasp the implications of that experience that America today is genuinely different. For the world has changed in ways that make imperial power uniquely difficult to sustain.

In the first place, it is hard to be an imperial democracy. Given the choice, voters are reluctant to pay the full cost of sustaining an empire. In a democratic setting the sentiment that money might be better spent at home can be more easily exploited by political opponents, especially when expensive postwar "stabilization and reconstruction" (i.e., nation-building) is at stake. That is why US administrations have sought to underwrite overseas adventures (first in Vietnam and now in Iraq) by borrowing money rather than taxing the American citizenry, and have tried, so far as possible, to outsource—i.e., privatize—the unglamorous nation-building part.

Moreover, the US is handicapped when it comes to exporting the image of its own democratic virtues: because it has rather too many undemocratic allies (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan come to mind) and because America does not always regard democracy as an unalloyed virtue if it produces the wrong results. Open elections in Iraq or Palestine right now would produce outcomes wholly unwelcome in Washington, as they have done or threatened to do in other places at other times.[4] The British and the French, not to mention the Russians, did not have this problem: whatever "values" they were exporting, universal suffrage was not one of them.

Secondly, it is almost impossible to practice empire in a world of instantaneous mass media transmission. Imperial control is violent. Colonization, as the Marquis de Gervais observed apropos of France's seizure of Algeria back in the 1830s, unavoidably entails "the expulsion and extermination of the natives." [5] But most people at home in the imperial metropole never saw that. Not so today.

To watch crimes being enacted is very different from reading about them after the fact. That is why Bill Clinton was forced into the Balkans in 1995, once the images from Bosnia had become daily fare on American television. There is a good reason why Washington now "embeds" reporters and looks with disfavor upon the independent Qatar-based al-Jazeera television network (whose equipment we damaged in both Kabul and Baghdad and which the sovereign authorities in Iraq have now temporarily banned) – the same reason the Bush administration severely restricts visual coverage of American casualties in Iraq.

The crimes of Abu Ghraib were as nothing set against what King Leopold of Belgium did to his Congolese slave laborers or the British massacre of 379 civilians at Amritsar in the Punjab in 1919. The difference is that everyone has seen what happened at Abu Ghraib. We don't know how ordinary Belgians would have responded to seeing what their government was doing in central Africa; but in any case our own sensibilities are heightened. When the inevitable dirty work of exercising power over reluctant foreigners – expropriation, violence, corpses – is available in real time for all to see, the case for empire becomes a lot harder to sell.

Thirdly, the US cannot be an effective empire precisely because it comes in the wake of all the other empires before it and must pay the price for their missteps as well as its own. The French had been to Vietnam before the US got there. The Russians (and before them the British) have been to Afghanistan. And everyone has been to the Middle East. When Donald Rumsfeld assured his troops in Baghdad that unlike many armies in the world, you came not to conquer, not to occupy, but to liberate, and the Iraqi people know this [emphasis added] he was decidedly unoriginal. That's what the British General Stanley Maude said in Baghdad ninety-seven years earlier ("Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators") – not to mention Napoleon Bonaparte's proclamation upon occupying Alexandria in 1798:

Oh Egyptians...I have not come to you except for the purpose of restoring your rights from the hands of the oppressors.

Let us concede, for the sake of argument, that American intentions are more honorable than those of the perfidious Brits and hypocritical French. It really doesn't matter. The history of what they went on to do is what counts—and what is remembered and weighed in the balance when American behavior is assessed from abroad.[6] The name Mohammad Mossadegh doesn't trip readily off many educated American tongues. But as the elected prime minister of Iran who was unceremoniously bundled out of office in 1953 by an Anglo-American coup his memory is invoked all across the Middle East whenever the subject of Western intervention in the region comes up. Americans may be only dimly aware of this history, but others are better informed.

Even when the US is free of any responsibility for some malevolent colonial undertaking, it still inherits the consequences. Iraq, it is now being whispered abroad, is America's "Suez": an ill-advised foreign expedition that brought initial military success but long-term discredit and catastrophic loss of influence. The implications of this demeaning comparison ought to be a source of concern in Washing-ton. Unparalleled military superiority counts for far less than its besotted advocates sometimes suppose.

Americans may be from Mars, but this is Planet Earth. It isn't significant that our armed forces can outspend and outshoot any hypothetical foe. All they have to be able to do in order to exert effective military hegemony is beat with ease any actual, existing enemy. The rest is superfluity.[7] And that level of domination has been reached by a number of empires and armies (or navies) in the past—Napoleon among them. In the end, of course, all were brought low: more often than not by their own mistakes. Are America's prospects any different?

One reason to be pessimistic about America is the mediocrity of its current political class. A brilliant elite is no guarantee of political wisdom, as David Halberstam reminded us many years ago.[8] But its absence is a bad omen. Douglas Feith, the Pentagon undersecretary for policy and a prominent representative of the generation of neoconservatives now installed in Washington, was recently described by General Tommy Franks (who had to deal with him in Iraq) as "the fucking stupidest guy on the face of the earth." Even allowing for the fighting soldier's traditional contempt for civilian interlopers, this should give us pause—it is hard to imagine Eisenhower being driven to describe Charles Bohlen or George Kennan in these terms.[9]

The generation of intellectuals and politicians responsible for US foreign policy today did not emerge by chance, as John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge convincingly demonstrate in *The Right Nation*, their detailed account of right-wing political culture in contemporary America. While the great liberal foundations were irresponsibly throwing hundreds of millions of dollars at fashionable scholarship and "politically correct" causes, a small group of American philanthropists and institutions spent the Seventies and Eighties underwriting a revival of conservative political strategy. By the end of the cold war a new generation of right-wing thinkers and activists had recaptured—for the first time in many decades—the initiative in public policy making: so much so that their ideas had become the conventional wisdom. Many of Bill Clinton's successful domestic policies (like those of Tony Blair) were adaptations of initiatives first mooted in conservative think tanks.

But overseas policy was another matter. In their prime the British and French empires could draw on a wealth of specialized overseas knowledge—of terrain, of history, of languages. The soldiers, administrators, businessmen, and proconsuls who ran these empires were often scholarly experts in their own right and had in many cases lived and traveled for decades in the countries they now

ruled. The same was true of the journalists and writers who commented on them. That didn't make imperial rule any more welcome, but it did keep it well-informed. A comparably talented foreign policy elite emerged in the US in the wake of World War II; it has now been all but eclipsed.[10]

Although the new conservatives at the American Enterprise Institute or the Heritage Foundation never lacked for foreign policy pundits, expertise was another matter. Whereas position papers on domestic policy emanating from these institutions were usually detailed and rigorous—if somewhat ideologically tendentious—recommendations for US policy overseas inclined to the hyperbolic. Strategic ambition was typically present in inverse proportion to professional competence[11] —and almost no one in these circles had any military experience, so there was a natural disposition to exaggerate the scope for military action and minimize its risks.

The result was a form of intellectual overreach whose best-known public manifestation comes in the messianic sound-bites written for George W. Bush: America is engaged in a historic mission "to change the world" (from the presidential press conference on April 13 of this year) is a representative example. The point, as William Kristol explained it at the American Enterprise Institute in March 2003, is to get some "respect" for America in places like the Middle East: first Baghdad, and then on to regime change in Tehran and Damascus. The inept execution of the Iraq misadventure has thus been a severe disappointment to the Pentagon cheerleading bench, who spent the Nineties dreaming of a Mesopotamian initiative. They now feel personally affronted. When the editors of *The New Republic* asked "Were we wrong?" (to advocate war in Iraq), they concluded that no, war was always a good idea. But by misleading the country and the world in order to get his war, the President let them down.[12]

If the right has proved inadequate to the task of imagining and executing a responsible foreign policy for the twenty-first century, its critics have done little better. While neoconservatives culpably overestimated America's capacity to dominate the actual world, the left continued to dream up worlds of its own imagining. In an age when the right to bear (nuclear) arms may soon be available to any criminally disposed person on the planet, and when the problem of maintaining security in an open society is the most difficult challenge facing any democratic government (albeit cynically exploited by the present American one), what is the most popular source of political enlightenment on American campuses today? *Empire*, by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri—now accompanied by the same authors' *Multitude*.

Both books are dreadful. Anyone old enough to remember the revolutionary rhetoric of the Seventies will recognize the style, notwithstanding the postmodern updating. Negri, who spent many years in prison for his part in the homicidal radicalism of Italy's Lead Years, has learned nothing and forgotten nothing (Hardt is presumably too young to have known anything in the first place). There are no subjects in these books: just structures, processes, and "de-centered" forces and "encounters." The proposition—to flatter more than nine hundred pages of flaccid, inept prose—is that the "multitude" will be brought together by the workings of "empire" and (with the familiar help of some cleansing violence) will rise up and break its shackles:

Empire...by colonizing and interconnecting more areas of human life ever more deeply, has actually created the possibility for democracy of a sort never before seen. Brought together in a multinoded commons [sic] of resistance, different groups combine and recombine in fluid new matrices of resistance. This is globalization for the politically challenged. In place of the boring old class struggle we have the voracious imperial nexus now facing a challenger of its own creation, the de-centered multitudinous commonality: Alien versus Predator. Through his American dummy, Negri is ventriloquizing a twenty-first-century paraphrase of Marxist theories

of imperialism popularized by Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin at the end of the nineteenth. The originals were much better written and distinctly more politically threatening, since they had some purchase upon reality. With the American left reading Multitude, Dick Cheney can sleep easy.

David Harvey, by contrast, is a Marxist anthropologist who actually does know something about the way empires work. Building on his claim that there is a permanent tension in American foreign policy between the logic of territorial dominion and the imperatives of a global market, Harvey has some interesting geopolitical reflections to offer upon the illusion of democratic "voluntary" empire. However much the US might genuinely seek to democratize the foreign countries dependent on it and win them over for its way of life, it is sooner or later driven to undermine such exercises of "soft power" by manipulating their domestic policies through a "predatory devaluation of [their] assets."

There seems to me some uncertainty in *The New Imperialism* over what distinguishes "function" (the core workings of capitalism) from "intention" (the stated aims of American foreign policy): in Harvey's hands the latter is accorded little autonomy and even less attention. There is also a little too much genuflection in the direction of Lenin and Kautsky. But that is negligible beside the major drawback to this book, which is that Harvey, too, has a writing problem. Some samples:

The consolidation of bourgeois political power within the European states was, therefore, a necessary precondition for a reorientation of territorial politics to-wards the requirements of the capitalistic logic. The molecular processes of capital accumulation operating in space and time generate passive revolutions in the geographical patterning of capital accumulation. If you didn't already agree, you aren't likely to be convinced by something that reads like a parody of a radical sociology lecture from 1972. The point, as Marx observed back in 1845, is either to interpret the world or to change it. This sort of prose advances neither objective.

Fortunately, not everyone writes like this. Corey Robin's account of the place of fear in American life is refreshingly clear—and timely. The first half of his book is a brisk account of the idea of fear in political argument from Hobbes to Arendt; the second a forthright discussion of "Fear, American Style." Some of his observations about the American pairing of optimism and fear—or autonomy and compliance—will be familiar to readers of Tocqueville, though Robin illustrates the American propensity to conformity with a particularly chilling quotation from Dan Rather on media self-censorship in the wake of September 11:

It is an obscene comparison—you know I am not sure I like it—but you know there was a time in South Africa that people would put flaming tires around people's necks if they dissented. And in some ways the fear is that you will be necklaced here, you will have a flaming tire of lack of patriotism put around your neck.... Now it is that fear that keeps journalists from asking the toughest of the tough questions. It starts with a feeling of patriotism within oneself. It carries through with a certain knowledge that the country as a whole—and for all the right reasons—felt and continues to feel this surge of patriotism within themselves. And one finds oneself saying, "I know the right question, but you know what? This is not exactly the right time to ask it."

2.

Two of the author's arguments have a special bearing on our present situation. The Madisonian institutions of limited government and separated powers are commonly believed to protect the citizenry against the abuses of state power, and so they do (although only citizens, not aliens, need feel protected). But in Robin's view the American system leaves civil society disproportionately underregulated, with the result that the American workplace in particular is a

site of managerial coercion and workers' fear in a way no longer true of any other Western society. This overstates the case—and anyway, whether the US government in the age of John Ashcroft would be quite so recognizable to Madison may be open to question. But there is no doubt that the American social model now stands at a disconcerting tangent to the rest of the West.[13]

Robin's most interesting observation, however, concerns what he calls the "liberalism of terror." For some time now the center of gravity of left-liberal politics in America and elsewhere has been what Judith Shklar once called the liberalism of fear: the belief that the twentieth century taught us that radical projects to accomplish social goals in the service of grand visions were unwise and that the best way to think about liberal politics was to "ramble through a moral minefield." This was one source of the turn to human rights in the last third of the century; it is the reason why many otherwise secular thinkers are sympathetic to George Bush's emphasis on "evil" and "terror" as the ultimate threats to the republic; and it accounts for support by many liberals for overseas intervention to prevent genocide or topple dictators.[14]

Robin argues, against the grain of a generation of mainstream liberal thought, that this is a seriously insufficient basis for political action. He also claims that it diverts liberal attention away from domestic injustice, since it is easier to identify absolute evil in Bosnia or Rwanda (or Iraq) than in one's own democratic republic, however imperfect. And of course it is easier to triumph over terror or evil in foreign incarnations than it is to conquer injustice or fear at home, where compromises and disappointments are inevitable.

I'm reluctant to swallow this argument whole. Having favored intervention in Kosovo but opposed it in Iraq, I—like anyone else who wishes to be taken seriously in public policy debates—had better come up with good reasons for these hard choices: there will be more of them in years to come. A left that won't engage the reality of evil overseas because it wants to refocus attention on injustice at home is no better equipped to face our brave new world than a right that invokes the "war against terror" as an excuse for thinking about nothing else.

Nevertheless, after reading Robin with a skeptical eye, I found my attention caught by a recent remark by Michael Ignatieff, perhaps the best-known proponent of the "negative" liberalism Robin dislikes. "Iraq...", Ignatieff declared, "has made the case for liberal interventionism impossible." [15] Really? So in retrospect we were wrong to attack the Serbs in Bosnia? And we would be wrong again to send the Marines into Darfur? Isn't Michael Ignatieff folding the tent just a little bit hastily? He is one of a number of prominent liberal intellectuals—Adam Michnik in Poland, for example, and André Glucksmann in Paris—who supported George W. Bush's Iraq policy as part of the ongoing struggle against political tyranny and moral relativism. Having thus deluded themselves into believing that the American president was conducting his foreign policy for their reasons, some of them are understandably disgruntled.

But is liberal internationalism so vulnerable, so politically unsecured that one of its core moral tenets can be collapsed by the mendacious misdealings of a single conservative president? Maybe Robin is correct after all. But in that case how should Americans think about foreign policy?

One problem with both left and right is that they look upon America's foreign dealings as a zero-sum game. Either the US is sovereign, in which case it should be free of all foreign entanglements, cooperating only with those willing or constrained to accept its leadership. Or else the US, like everyone else, must adapt to a borderless world and relinquish some national sovereignty to international authorities for the benefit of all.

Faced with that choice the outcome is foreordained. Their debt-ridden economy may be in thrall to foreign investors and their overstretched military desperate for allied help; but most US congressmen (like their constituents) don't hold a passport and haven't been overseas. They will never "relinquish" sovereignty to some toothless international authority. Liberal internationalists who want to justify intervention in foreign lands—on the grounds that the tradition of "Westphalia"[16] is defunct and the integrity of states has been replaced by international law—will be doomed to accept one law for the US and another for everyone else.

But that isn't the choice and it hasn't been for quite a while. As Anne-Marie Slaughter shows in her new book, *A New World Order*, from the World Trade Organization and the World Court to the international organization of securities commissioners, the United States is already inextricably integrated into a complex web of agencies and networks that inform, oversee, regulate, negotiate, and in practice shape much of what happens in America no less than everywhere else. This much is the truth in "globalization." The fallacy, as she demonstrates, is to suppose that all this either signals or necessitates the end of the sovereign state, much less the coming of a supranational, global system of government.

A New World Order offers copious evidence for what Slaughter, a prominent international lawyer and dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy at Princeton, calls *de facto* global "governance." Of course states exist, she says, and they aren't going away. They will be the only imaginable form of legitimate political organization and government for the foreseeable future. But untrammelled, autonomous sovereignty is no more. Instead sovereignty is "relational": bankers, policemen, environmentalists, doctors, Supreme Court justices, ministers, and countless others now exchange and share information and precedents and proposals.

Some trans-state links and networks are based on an explicit treaty or agreement; others—such as the US committee on international judicial relations in which American judges collaborate with their colleagues abroad—remain informal. But the mere existence of this horizontally networked world—some of it truly venerable, like the International Postal Union or the Nordic Council, but with new intergovernmental entities "popping up" every year—encourages convergence and cooperation with, and compliance by, the vertically organized states in its embrace. The result is not top-down imposition of rules but an accumulation of common cross-border practices and the domestic incorporation of regulations and procedures first applied or proposed somewhere else. In the longer run Slaughter sees this producing, in her own field for instance, a global legal system "established not by the World Court in The Hague, but by national courts working together around the world."

A New World Order is not an easy book to read but it is important. By showing how today's world—of what she calls "disaggregated states"—actually works, Slaughter cuts the ground away from nationalists and internationalists alike. This, she says, is how it is, for America and everyone else. She also, quite clearly, believes that this is how it should be—because a world of collaborative networks that acknowledges state sovereignty while securing and facilitating interstate cooperation is inherently desirable; and because nothing else will work.

It is not clear to me how democratic politics fits in here—this may be how the world actually works but most people don't know that. What if they choose—like the American people—to be governed in their own country by leaders who are actively unsympathetic to Slaughter's new world order and who would seek to unravel or just ignore it? There would be nothing to stop them: certainly not the United Nations. As Slaughter acknowledges, a certain kind of power will always be retained by the state and no supervening authority exists to stop it abusing that power.

The problem of force, and the legitimate application and regulation of force in international affairs, are not addressed in her book.

But if Slaughter doesn't pretend to have all the answers, she does have a working model. If you want to see what this new world order of voluntarily linked sovereign states will actually look like, she says, go to Europe. There, the European Union is "pioneering a new form of regional collective governance that is likely to prove far more relevant to global governance than the experience of traditional federal states." The "genius" of the EU, in Slaughter's view, is that it maximizes the benefits of international governance while avoiding the risks of centralization. Legitimacy and power remain at the national level while the regulatory agencies in Brussels are authorized to organize and administer transnational regulations and rules that are supposed to work to everyone's advantage and often do.

This seems to me a rather generous reading of the EU, which is not universally appreciated in Europe these days, and is anyway an accident of that continent's unique history. But I have absolutely no doubt that Slaughter is on to something. Seen from the rest of the world, the arrangements that Europeans have worked out for themselves are by far the most attractive and realistic solution to the problems that states and societies alike will face in the coming decades. Given that we have to start from where we are and not some better place, they are the only way to get anywhere.

And what of the US, all dressed up in its martial finery but with no place to go? What if America—"the hope of the world," as Churchill told Clark Clifford on the train to Fulton in March 1946—were now irrelevant: still Madeleine Albright's "indispensable nation," but less for the example it offers than because of its capacity to impede the wishes of others? We haven't reached that point yet—in 1995 the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Shalikashvili, observed that "absent America's leadership role, things still don't get put together right"; and little has changed.[17]

But as Shalikashvili would doubtless agree, it is hard to be a leader if your behavior is not admired, your authority not respected, your example not emulated. All that remains to you is force. Of course, as the neocons are fond of repeating, a good prince would rather be feared than loved; but what they forget is that the same is true of most bad princes. An empire built on fear—fear of terror and the aspiration to make others fear us in turn—is not what Machiavelli (or Jefferson) had in mind.

The challenge facing American voters in the coming elections is not to find a president who can convince the world that the US isn't an empire—or else, if it is an empire, that its intentions are honorable. That argument has been lost and is now beside the point. Nor is it even a question of choosing between being loved and being feared. Thanks to America's performance in Iraq—and our evident inability to plan one war at a time, much less two—we are neither loved nor feared. We have shocked the world, yes; but few now hold us in awe.

And yet the election of 2004 is the most consequential since 1932, if not since 1860. Is John Kerry the man for the moment? I doubt it. Does he fully grasp the scale of America's crisis? I'm not sure. But what is absolutely certain is that George W. Bush does not. If Bush is reelected much of the world (and many millions of its own citizens) will turn away from America: perhaps for good, certainly for many years. On November 2 the whole world will be looking: not to see what America is going to do in future years, but to find out what sort of a place it will be.

With our growing income inequities and child poverty; our underperforming schools and disgracefully inadequate health services; our mendacious politicians and crude, partisan media; our suspect voting machines and our gerrymandered congressional districts; our bellicose religiosity and our cult of guns and executions; our cavalier unconcern for institutions, treaties, and laws—our own and other people's: we should not be surprised that America has ceased to be an example to the world. The real tragedy is that we are no longer an example to ourselves. America's born-again president insists that we are engaged in the war of Good against Evil, that American values "are right and true for every person in every society." Perhaps. But the time has come to set aside the Book of Revelation and recall the admonition of the Gospels: For what shall it profit a country if it gain the whole world but lose its own soul?

Notes

[1] America's Inadvertent Empire, p. 36. The book is not all this bad, though much of it is trite and smug. One chapter, on the US military, is excellent—presumably written by Odom, a retired lieutenant general and former director of the National Security Agency. Odom provides a cogent account of the Pentagon's remarkable failure to anticipate the tasks that American forces will face in coming years, including peacekeeping and maintaining the security of beleaguered states. Like many other commentators, Odom and his coauthor make much of the way America's allies in Europe were "free-riders" during the cold war, suggesting that this somehow makes American power distinctive. But there were free riders under the British Empire too—that is just how empires work.

[2] Bush speech at the White House, July 30, 2002; presidential cover letter (September 17, 2002) to The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, quoted in Rashid Khalidi's excellent essay Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East, p. 3.

[3] See, e.g., Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Public Affairs, 2004), a restatement of his earlier essay *The Paradox of American Power* (Oxford University Press, 2002), which I discussed in *The New York Review*, August 15, 2002.

[4] On April 13, 1976, fearing that the Italian Communist Party (at the time supported by over one third of Italian voters) might be invited to take office in a coalition ministry, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger publicly declared—just nine weeks before the forthcoming Italian elections—that the US would "not welcome" a Communist role in the government of Italy.

[5] Quoted by Khalidi in *Resurrecting Empire*, p. 182.

[6] In Iraq Rumsfeld is best remembered for his enthusiastic wooing of Saddam Hussein in the early Eighties, when the Iraqi dictator really was manufacturing and using chemical weapons—on Iranians. See Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*, p. 187, n. 13.

[7] This seems to be better appreciated by soldiers than by their civilian superiors. See *America's Inadvertent Empire*, Chapter 3: "The Military Power Gap."

[8] *The Best and the Brightest* (Random House, 1972).

[9] Franks is quoted by Bob Woodward in *Plan of Attack* (Simon and Schuster, 2004), p. 281. Feith, now number three in the Defense Department, was coauthor, along with Richard Perle, of *A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm*, a foreign policy memorandum delivered to incoming Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 1996. Among its recommendations is the removal of Saddam Hussein as the opening move in a plan to reshape the Middle East. See [www .israeleconomy.org/strat1.htm](http://www.israeleconomy.org/strat1.htm).

[10] The US State Department remains a repository of specialized knowledge and skills; but one of the achievements of the conservative intellectual revolution has been to ensure that no one listens to the State Department any more.

[11] Thus Charles Krauthammer advised an audience at the American Enterprise Institute in May 2003 that the "Bush Doctrine" (of preemptive, preventive war) rivaled the Truman Doctrine in "audacity, success and revolutionary nature." See *The Right Nation*, p. 414, n. 10. Audacity, perhaps.

[12] Kristol and others are quoted in the Financial Times of March 22, 2003. For The New Republic see its edition of June 28, 2004, "Were We Wrong?" Note the unconscious echo here of an earlier generation of intellectuals out to change the world on the backs of others, and who particularly resented Stalin for blotting the escutcheon of Marxism.

[13] I shall have more to say about this in a subsequent essay.

[14] Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 6; also "The Liberalism of Fear," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, edited by Stanley Hoffmann (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[15] Quoted in the Financial Times, June 26/27, 2004, p. W2.

[16] The reference is to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia that ended the European Thirty Years' War and is commonly taken as the starting point for the modern state system.

[17] Shalikhvili is quoted by Richard Holbrooke in *To End a War* (Random House, 1998), p. 173.

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