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The Imperial Temptation

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- Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), x + 302 pp. ISBN 0-674-00940-1.
- Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic, 2002), xx + 428 pp. ISBN 0-465-00720-1.
- Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership* (New York: Basic, 2004), xii + 242 pp. ISBN 0-465-00800-3.
- Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (London: Allen Lane Penguin, 2004), 384 pp. ISBN 0-7139-9770-2.
- Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), xviii + 478 pp. ISBN 0-674-25121-0.
- Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), xviii + 428 pp. ISBN 0-684-87053-3.
- Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (London: Vintage, 2003), viii + 134 pp. ISBN 0-099-45543-9.
- John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivalled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), xxii + 321 pp. ISBN 0-8014-4063-7.
- Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Verso, 2004), xii + 390 pp. ISBN 1-85984-578-9.
- Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 104 pp. ISBN 1-400-04093-0.
- Robert D. Kaplan, *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos* (New York: Random House, 2002), xxii + 201. ISBN 0-375-50563-6.
- Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945: From 'Empire' by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), xii + 331 pp. ISBN 0-19-926668-9.
- James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2004), xx + 426 pp. ISBN 0-670-03299-9.
- Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (New York: Verso, 2003), viii + 278 pp. ISBN 1-85984-582-7.
- Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It*



- Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xviii + 380 pp. ISBN 0-415-93536-9.
- Joseph S. Nye, Jr, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), xviii + 222 pp. ISBN 0-19-515088-0.
- Emmanuel Todd, *Après l'Empire. Essai sur la décomposition du système américain* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 238 pp. ISBN 2-07-076710-8. [English translation: *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), xxiii + 236 pp. ISBN 0-231-13102-X].

IN A 2003 ARTICLE IN *MILLENNIUM*, Michael Cox suggested that from a scholarly point of view, it makes sense to consider the USA as an empire, since this makes it possible to draw interesting comparisons with other empires, such as the British Empire.¹ Cox's argument might, in fact, be turned around. Today's US hegemony might more fruitfully be compared with Britain's hegemony over much of the world in the mid-19th century – before the creation of the Raj, the colonization of Southeast Asia and the scramble for Africa – than with the fully blown British Empire. Such a comparison would open our eyes to how the USA risks succumbing to the same temptation that transformed Britain from mainly an informal hegemon into an outright imperial power, subduing other nations through formal institutional arrangements. The most successful parts of Britain's global hegemony were no doubt its naval and commercial exploits, along with the migration of British colonizers to North America, Australia and New Zealand, not the colonial subjugation of Asia and Africa. Another relative success story was Britain's pragmatic approach to decolonization in the years after World War II.

How important is the distinction between informal hegemony and formal subjugation? It is so essential that for scholarly purposes formal dominion should be the defining feature of empire. Hegemony is more flexible, more easy to dismantle without armed conflict. Hegemony is less likely to provoke outright local revolts than a formal system of dominance, and is also less likely to lead to conflict with third parties. A hegemonic form of dominance allows for sharing influence with others, even sometimes discussing and resolving problems in shared arenas like the UN Security Council. For people with a strong attachment to their state, ethnic group or homeland, it will also normally be more tolerable to be subjected to informal dominance

¹ See the dialogue section in *Security Dialogue* 35(2): 227–262, where J. Peter Burgess, Michael Cox, Benjamin R. Barber, Robert Hunter Wade, Richard Saull, Andrew Hurrell and Peter Gowan discuss the American Empire, with reference to Michael E. Cox, 2003. 'The Empire's Back in Town: Or America's Imperial Temptation – Again', *Millennium* 32(1): 1–29.

than to formal colonization. Thailand, the former Siam, may be a case in point. It was never formally colonized, but accepted British hegemony from the 1870s to the 1930s, shifted to Japan in 1940, to the USA in 1944, and may now be on its way to complying with Chinese regional predominance. By always leaning informally to the strongest power of the day, Thailand has reaped many benefits. It does not, like some of its neighbours, have a proud history of anti-colonial liberation, but has always enjoyed relative independence and mostly avoided war.

It would be exceedingly dangerous for the USA to take the step from informal hegemon to imperial power. Sooner or later, this would be resented by the subject peoples, no matter how bad their previous regimes. It would cause anxiety among neighbouring and other major powers, and possibly stimulate trade wars and arms races. If it decides to stick to its anti-imperial tradition, the United States may avoid enormous costs to itself and sidestep the inevitable sequence of decline and fall that empires have gone through in the past. US President George W. Bush may not be dishonest when he says that the USA has no territorial ambitions and does not seek an empire. Yet his policies have set military, political, economic and cultural processes in motion that could lead to empire by default. If its client states resist US wishes or subject peoples rise in open revolt, then Washington may find it expedient to subject them to occupation and durable forms of tutelage. At first, this will be said to be done on a provisional basis, out of necessity. Americans will see themselves as living up to an obligation, carrying a burden, and they will be encouraged to do so by the British and other governments. However, once a system of tutelage is in place, there will be open protagonists of empire around to make a virtue of necessity, and the 'American Empire' may end up being defended by the White House in a truly crusading fashion.

This essay reviews the use of the term 'empire' in recent books on US foreign policy. Is the USA an imperial power? Ought it to be imperial? And can the USA survive as empire? While these questions have been discussed for a long time, the debate has intensified more recently, under the impression of the Bush doctrine and the US occupation of Iraq. It has now become commonplace to characterize the USA as imperial. As of 2004, this is still impossible for responsible US leaders, but if the current trend in publishing spills over to the popular media (and the USA maintains its military presence and control of Iraq), it may not be long before a US president speaks proudly of an imperial obligation. Some writers, notably Niall Ferguson, Robert D. Kaplan and Max Boot, are already urging Bush to do so.

Ferguson met Robert Kagan at the American Enterprise Institute on 17 July 2003 for a widely publicized debate on the motion 'The United States is, and should be, an empire'. Ferguson, a young and eminent British historian, had become widely known in the USA following the publication of his

magisterial work *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (2003). At the American Enterprise Institute, he characterized the USA as a more powerful empire than the British had ever been and urged the Americans to stop denying their imperial status, to learn from the British experience and to do their imperial job properly. Niall Ferguson is the world's most articulate and eager protagonist of an American liberal empire today. He has made his views forcefully known in his new impressive work *Colossus*.

Ferguson not only claims that the USA is an empire. He declares himself 'fundamentally in favor of empire' (p. 24) and urges the United States to give up its reluctance to be imperial. Ferguson thinks the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq may presage a transition to more direct and formal imperial structures (p. 13), and argues that the USA should uphold its old responsibility for Liberia and keep it under direct control. However, he fears that the Americans will continue with their old habit of only conquering in order to abandon. He compares the British experiences in Iraq 1916–58 and in Egypt 1883–1956, when Britain never quite relinquished control, with the current US obsession with exit strategies (p. 202). He hopes these strategies will prove to have been hypocritical, since hypocrisy may be rational in imperial affairs: 'There is in fact a great deal to be said for promising to leave – provided you do not actually mean it or do it' (p. 217). In a lucid analysis of the US experience in the Philippines 1898–1946, Ferguson discerns seven characteristic phases of US engagement with the countries it occupies: '1. Impressive initial military success 2. A flawed assessment of indigenous sentiment 3. A strategy of limited war and gradual escalation of forces 4. Domestic disillusionment in the face of protracted and nasty conflict 5. Premature democratization 6. The ascendancy of domestic economic considerations 7. Ultimate withdrawal' (p. 48). He fears that this will repeat itself in Iraq. Ferguson is not afraid of an American Caesar. What he fears is that reluctance on the part of the USA to do the imperial job will leave the little countries with their own local 'Caesars – and, all too often, the Caligulas too' (p. 104). Ferguson makes a case for liberal empire and the spread of free trade through a controlled process of globalization. And, in newly occupied countries, it is more urgent to institute the rule of law than democracy (p. 225). Democratization takes time.

There is little doubt that Ferguson means what he says. To most people, his views will be shocking. Yet his book is a historical goldmine. It is eminently written, based on impressive knowledge of economic and military affairs, full of wonderfully pertinent quotes, scattered with creatively constituted tables and also includes an interesting chapter on the weaknesses and strengths of the European Union. Plus, at the end of the book he surprises the reader by emphasizing how unlikely it is that the USA will be able to become a successful empire. It suffers from three 'deficits': a financial deficit, a man-

Table 1. Table of views

The USA	is an empire	is a different kind of empire or nation	is an empire in decline	is not an empire
should be an empire	Ferguson, Kaplan, Boot	Ignatieff, Ikenberry (2001)		
may be described as empire		Lundestad	Todd	x ¹
should be denounced as empire	Mann	Hardt & Negri		x
should not be an empire	Bacevich	Huntington	Chalmers Johnson	Nye, Brzezinsky, Kagan, Ikenberry (2004)

¹ The 'x' means this is a logically impossible position.

power deficit and an attention deficit. Ferguson argues that, due mainly to enormous Medicare commitments and inadequate tax levels, the USA is engaged in a 'financial overstretch' and will depend increasingly on the Chinese National Bank keeping its dollar reserves and US bonds. In my view, this should mean that the USA must not become an empire, but should realize the limits to its power and therefore seek partnership with China as well as the EU, within a multilateral system of cooperation. Ferguson is a truly creative scholar, with a good grasp both of politics and economics, but with sharply improbable views. He is more impressive than convincing. What he does not take into account is the intrinsic value many people see in managing their own affairs. The dissolution of the British Empire did not just result from the undermining of the British economy or from resentment over lacking economic opportunities, but also from the humiliation of being ruled by foreigners. What Ferguson also forgets is that if US control of other countries becomes direct and formal, then other powers will fear the USA more than they have done in the past, devise counter-strategies and form alliances to counterbalance US power. It is not just Americans who cherish their country's anti-imperial tradition. To the extent that US hegemony is at all tolerable, this is only if it is not imperial.

In two less impressive books, Robert D. Kaplan and Max Boot express the same view as Ferguson. Kaplan, in *Warrior Politics*, draws lessons from the thinking of imperial, military and political strategic thinkers, such as Churchill, Livy, Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Malthus and more recent realist thinkers. He also discusses Kant and finds that the challenge of realism is to combine tough tactics with long-range Kantian goals.

He does not believe in Kantian means: 'Defeating warriors will depend on our speed of reaction, not international law' (p. x). His realism leads him to dismiss last century's 'disastrous utopian hopes', which have only 'brought us back to imperialism' (p. 147), and he defines imperialism as 'that most ordinary and dependable form of protection for ethnic minorities and others under violent assault' (p. 147). Despite the USA's anti-imperial tradition, and despite the fact that imperialism has been illegitimate in public discourse, 'an imperial reality already dominates our foreign policy'. Kaplan warns, however, against expanding the 'multi-ethnic American imperium' through one single war. It must be done 'nimbly'. Kaplan often likens the USA to Rome – not the Roman Republic, but the Empire after Julius Caesar.

The argument of Max Boot, a military historian associated with the US Council on Foreign Relations, resembles Kaplan's. In *The Savage Wars of Peace*, which runs through the history of the USA's *small wars* abroad (in modern parlance, 'low intensity conflicts') from 1801 until today, Boot urges the leaders of his country to be less apologetic, less hesitant, less humble. He admits there could be a danger of imperial overstretch, but the danger of under-commitment and lack of confidence is greater. The USA should not be afraid to fight 'the savage wars of peace' if such a path is necessary to enlarge the 'empire of liberty' (p. 352). This empire, he emphasizes, is not formal like the British, but consists of a family of democratic, capitalist nations that 'eagerly seek shelter' under Uncle Sam's umbrella (p. xx). He pleads for a 'pax americana' and a revival of the mandate system practised by the League of Nations in the 1920s (p. 352). On 5 May 2003, a few days after President Bush had declared an end to what then seemed to be a 'small war' in Iraq, Boot wrote in *USA Today* that the USA should establish permanent bases in that country. It should keep them for many years, perhaps decades: 'We're going to be called an empire whatever we do. We might as well be a successful empire.'

Michael Ignatieff, a professor at Harvard of Canadian origin, also builds his advocacy of a US liberal empire on the USA's military capacity. His pro-imperial argument is not based on the interests of the imperial power itself, but on concern for the people living in failed states or under oppressive regimes. On the basis of recent experiences in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, Ignatieff argues in favour of a 'temporary imperialism', which he calls 'Empire Lite'. He defines this as a 'hegemony without colonies, a global sphere of influence without the burden of direct administration' (p. 2). In this empire, the Europeans play a useful role in providing legitimacy and multi-lateral support through peacebuilding, nation-building and humanitarian construction. A division of labour has emerged in which the USA does the fighting, the Canadians, French, British and Germans do the policing in the border zones, and the Dutch, Swiss and Scandinavians provide humanitarian aid (p. 18). He claims as a paradox that imperialism has become a

precondition for democracy. The Iraqi opposition, he argues, could never overcome tyranny without an American–British military victory, followed by ‘a long occupation’ (p. 24). Ignatieff criticizes the Bush administration for wanting to do Iraq ‘on the cheap’. Washington calls this nation-building lite. But, says Ignatieff, ‘empires don’t come lite. They come heavy, or they do not last. And neither does the peace they are meant to preserve’ (p. 79). This undermines his own argument. He shows how the ‘humanitarian imperialist’, once having chosen to support an imperial undertaking, is forced to argue that the task must be carried through. For moral reasons, one cannot just intervene and then leave the locals to their destiny. It is actually Bush and Rumsfeld who would prefer an ‘Empire Lite’, while liberal imperialists like Ignatieff want to do it heavy and long-term. Ignatieff succinctly says: ‘Effective military power also requires controlling the subject people’s sense of time, convincing them that they will be ruled for ever’ (p. 90). He notes the paradox that ‘Empire means big government’, that Bush hates big government, and that still he was the one to initiate a big imperial undertaking in Iraq. Most recent imperial conquests have been followed by a preset exit timetable, since the occupants have not wanted to accept the cost of staying. Ignatieff sees a basic contradiction between, on the one hand, the desire to do empire on the cheap and yield power to the locals in fact as well as name, and, on the other hand, the need to provide long-term security guarantees. His book ends pessimistically. Although Ignatieff seems to prefer Empire Lite himself, he also admits that it is risky: ‘To exercise power in this way is to risk losing authority, and to risk losing everything eventually, since peoples disillusioned with our promises will have enduring reasons never to trust us again’ (p. 127).

‘Empire Lite’ is only one of many notions coined to describe the milder form of American empire. Others have spoken of ‘informal empire’ or ‘benevolent empire’, and in 1984 the Norwegian historian Geir Lundestad coined the influential term ‘empire by invitation’. At first, this was meant as a characterization of the US position in Western Europe during 1945–62, but Lundestad later extended his use of the term to the whole post-1945 era and to additional parts of the world. In his new magisterial history of US relations with Western Europe since 1945, Lundestad emphasizes that his use of the term ‘empire’ is not normative but ‘meant to be descriptive’, and he carefully explains: ‘in traditional empires most parts were ruled directly from the imperial capital, whereas the American “empire” consisted mostly of independent countries. I could have used the word “hegemony”, the term most frequently used by political scientists and political economists to describe the superior American role after 1945, but although the terms are different, in this case their meaning is largely the same’ (p. 1). Lundestad, it should be emphasized, does not claim that the US empire has always and everywhere been based on invitation. In some cases, it has been imposed. But the USA

was invited to remain in Western Europe after World War II, and a US presence has been welcome in many other places too.

Lundestad's term has been influential. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, (1986) refers to it in his *The Cycles of American History*, although he prefers to speak of 'informal empire'. John Ikenberry, one of today's leading liberal political scientists in the USA, has also been influenced by Lundestad's concept. In *America Unrivaled*, Ikenberry has assembled some of the best political science analysis available on US unipolarity, with articles from Kenneth N. Waltz, Charles A. Kupchan, William C. Wohlforth, Stephen N. Walt, Josef Joffe, Michael Mastanduno, John M Owen IV, Thomas Risse and himself. The central preoccupation of these authors is to explain that US unilateralism has not, as balance-of-power theory would imply, led other states to form counterbalancing alliances. Why have these states instead been 'bandwagoning'? While Wohlforth's answer is the sheer preponderance of US power, Ikenberry seeks the explanation in the liberal quality and attractiveness of US institutions, and the benefits they spread around the world. The book's chapters were written before the recent debate about empire; most of the authors use the term 'hegemony' or 'unipolar order' rather than 'empire', and do not engage in the 'e-word' debate. However, in 2001 Ikenberry expressed a more explicitly pro-imperial view. His idiom for the US world order was 'democratic-capitalist empire'. He claimed that the United States was a different type of hegemonic power and offered a broad and liberal definition of 'empire', inspired by Lundestad: 'If empires are coercive systems of domination, the American-centred world order is not an empire. If empires are inclusive systems of order organized around a dominant state – and its laws, economy, military, and political institutions – then the United States has indeed constructed a world democratic-capitalist empire' (Ikenberry, 2001: 192). Ikenberry claimed that US power was different, less threatening to other states, than normally assumed in theories of balance of power. Thus, it was also more likely to last. After 9/11, and reading Ferguson, Ikenberry abandoned the imperial camp, now claiming instead that the US order is 'not empire', but a 'democratic political order that has no name or historical antecedent' (Ikenberry, 2004: 154).

Like Lundestad, Ikenberry does not pretend to be purely descriptive. He prescribes. This should not be seen as a problem. It is impossible for scholars to detach themselves completely from the realm of politics when using such contentious terms as 'empire' in their publications. 'Empire' and 'imperialism' are words that have changed meaning and connotations several times in modern history, and these changes have happened because of political change, not new scientific discoveries. Any use of the term 'empire' will be part of an ongoing political process of either maintaining or changing its connotations. During the period of decolonization, the term was stigmatized. No one in their right minds could admit to favouring empire. The colonial

empires themselves changed their names to Commonwealth, Union and Rijksverbund. Only left-wing critics of US policies called the USA 'imperialist'. Then Lundestad, Schlesinger, Ikenberry and others started using 'empire' in a neutral, even positive sense. This allowed the term to once more become politically acceptable, and ultimately facilitated today's pro-imperial rhetoric.

While Ikenberry believes that the US democratic-capitalist order has a bright future, the bestselling French writer Emmanuel Todd concludes with remarkable assurance that it is in decline, heading for a fall. Todd cites a wealth of statistical information to indicate that US domination of the world is unsustainable. The USA has hesitated for the last twenty years between two types of economic and social organization, the nation and the empire. It has not abandoned all national characteristics, but 'it is clear that the imperial tendency accelerated between 1990 and 2000, more precisely between 1994 and 2000' (pp. 92–93). This places the United States before an unsolvable problem. In order to sustain itself, an imperial power must either extract a surplus from its colonies through military constraint, and use this to finance its rule, or treat all subjects equally, on the basis of a universalist creed. During its time of growth, the Roman Empire moved from one system to the other. The United States does not possess the necessary resources for carrying out either of these strategies. Todd devotes one chapter to showing that the USA does not have enough military manpower to force its foreign subjects to accept the extraction of a surplus, and another chapter to displaying that the USA does not have sufficient cultural power to globalize the peoples of the world in the American image, that is, treat them equally. Hence, there can be no doubt, says Todd, that by 2050 there will no longer be an American empire (pp. 95–96). Todd thus holds the exactly opposite view of Ikenberry. While Ikenberry sees a system based on democratic-capitalist co-optation rather than coercion as a source of durable strength, Todd sees this system as being in inevitable decline.

Michael Mann, in *Incoherent Empire*, holds a view that is only in partial agreement with that of Todd. Mann agrees that the USA cannot successfully carry out an imperial policy, but his argument is of a different kind. He claims that the USA has uneven resources at its disposal. He distinguishes between military, political, economic and ideological resources, and devotes separate chapters to each. The USA is a military giant, but a back-seat economic driver. Politically, it is schizophrenic, facing a number of challenges and contradictions it cannot resolve, and its ideology is a phantom of hollow, fine principles. The unevenness of the USA's resources makes it impossible to sustain an empire. It will have to build mainly on its military power, which has been tailored to defeat enemies, not to control an empire. The American empire will be militaristic, not benevolent, but also not sustainable. Militarism will soon turn out to be politically and ideologically unacceptable for Americans, and it will be impossible for Washington to

mobilize the necessary economic resources. If the USA adopts the kind of imperial policies advocated by the neoconservatives in the George W. Bush administration, this will inevitably lead to foreign policy failure. In turn there will be a reaction from the American population, who will force its leaders to abandon the imperial project. In this way, says Mann optimistically, most of the USA's hegemony may be saved and preserved.

An extreme version of the view that the US-centred empire is of a different kind can be found in Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri's *Empire*, which has inspired much postmodern criticism of US-style globalization. When they speak of Empire with a capital 'E', the authors do not mean the American state or the USA's domination of other countries. They de-Americanize the concept of 'empire' by presenting it as a transnational phenomenon, de-linked from national roots. Hardt & Negri emphasize that they use 'Empire' as a concept characterized fundamentally by a lack of boundaries: Empire's rule has no limits, but encompasses the entire 'civilized' world (p. xiv). Yet it is closely linked to US power. A whole chapter is dedicated to the American concept of sovereignty and its links with 'the new Empire'. US constitutional history provided for an 'extensive Empire', tending toward 'an open, expansive project operating on an unbounded terrain'. The authors say this has nothing to do with territorial expansion, pillage, genocide, colonization or slavery, but instead with 'network power'. The fundamental characteristic of imperial sovereignty 'is that *its space is always open*' (pp. 166–167). Today's Empire is not born out of US foreign relations, but has been created through the extension of *internal* constitutional processes transposed on the global scene: 'We are experiencing a first phase of the transformation of the global frontier into an open space of imperial sovereignty' (p. 182). A full chapter is dedicated to this imperial sovereignty, where 'there is no more outside' (p. 186). Since Hardt & Negri do not emphasize the state or its forces of coercion, and seem to assume that the transnational Empire will be highly durable despite various forms of resistance, their view, although belonging to an entirely different discourse, appears close to that of Ikenberry.

While Hardt & Negri do have a point, it is confusing to see the term 'Empire' being used for the same wide-ranging processes that are normally referred to as 'globalization'. There is a curious overlap between the critical analysis of Hardt & Negri and the visions expressed by the most enthusiastic American globalizers. What is often overlooked in analyses that build upon the universalist tradition in US culture is that US foreign and global policies are also shaped by other cultural traditions. In *Special Providence*, Walter Russell Mead presents the history of US foreign policy as a successful balancing act between proponents of four schools of thought. The universalist tendency is represented by the *Wilsonian* school, of which Jimmy Carter was the most recent representative in the White House. The *Hamiltonian* school, which carried strong weight in the Clinton administration, is mainly concerned with busi-

ness interests and open markets. The *Jacksonian* school, which in alliance with a group of Wilsonian deviationists ('Wilsonians with boots' or 'Vulcans') marched into the White House and the Pentagon in January 2001, emphasizes military values. James Mann's collective biography of the 'Vulcans' (Rumsfeld, Cheney, Powell, Armitage, Wolfowitz and Rice) provides a chilling, eminently readable account of how military thinking came to dominate not just the Pentagon, but also the State Department and the White House. Russell Mead's fourth school, which Mead himself feels has not for some time had sufficient impact on US foreign policy, is *Jeffersonian*. It sees US cultural values as exceptional rather than universal, is opposed to giving too much power to the federal government and is deeply critical of US interference in countries far away (the 'Midwest' against war in the 'Mideast'). This is clearly the most anti-imperial of Mead's four schools. Michael Moore, winner of the Palme d'Or at the 2004 Cannes film festival, is perhaps the leading advocate of this tradition's leftist version in the USA today. The current backlash against the US failure in Iraq may fulfil Mead's wish for a stronger dose of Jeffersonianism in the US foreign policy mix.

Andrew J. Bacevich is a disillusioned Jeffersonian in the tradition of Mark Twain and Charles Beard. In 1939, Beard warned against intervening in the European war. 'America is not to be Rome or Britain. . . . It is to be America', he argued (Bacevich, p. 242). Franklin Roosevelt took no heed of Beard's advice – and got away with it. In the post-World War II period, the Jeffersonian school took the form of Cold War revisionism, which scorned the Hamiltonian drive for exploiting the rest of the world economically. William Appleman Williams was revisionism's towering figure. He published a number of anti-imperial books and wrote in 1972 that the open-door policy was 'a classic strategy of *non-colonial imperial expansion*'. Bacevich, a former US military officer, places himself explicitly in the tradition of Beard and Appleman Williams. He claims that both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have pursued a 'coherent grand strategy', with the aim to 'preserve and, where both feasible and conducive to U.S. interests, to expand an American imperium' (pp. vii–ix). With reference to Williams, he claims that 'during the twentieth century the United States came to play a role that cannot be understood except as a variant of empire . . . openness adapted the logic of empire to suit the needs of democratic capitalism' (pp. 30–31). Bacevich does not hide his dislike for these developments, but also feels it is futile to try to do anything about it:

these are the actions of a nation engaged in the governance of empire. Continuing to pretend otherwise – in the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, 'frantically avoiding recognition of the imperialism which we in fact exercise' – won't make America's imperial problem any easier to manage and certainly won't make it go away. (p. 244)

Like it or not, he says, America today *is* Rome, committed irreversibly to the maintenance and, where feasible, expansion of an empire that differs from

every other empire in history: 'This is hardly a matter for celebration; but neither is there any purpose served by denying the facts.' The question that urgently demands attention is not whether the United States has become an imperial power: 'The question is what sort of empire they intend theirs to be' (p. 244). Hence, despite himself, Bacevich ends up with the same conclusion as Ferguson, Kaplan and Boot: The United States must live up to its imperial obligations.

The anti-universalist Samuel P. Huntington does not give up as easily as Bacevich. In *Who Are We?*, he continues to insist, just as he did in *The Clash of Civilizations*, that cultures are essentially different and should not seek to dominate or transform each other. The USA is not an empire, but a different kind of nation, with its own particular culture. Huntington, who proudly declares himself a patriot, warns against undermining US culture through excessive immigration – *and* interference in other cultures. He sees three alternatives for America: The cosmopolitan, the imperial and the national (p. 363). The first is the one he warned against under the Clinton administration: to embrace the world, to open up the USA to all kinds of influences. The second is the one he warns against now: to seek to remake the world in the American image: 'In such a world America loses its identity as a nation and becomes the dominant component of a supranational empire' (p. 364). In a truly Jeffersonian spirit, Huntington advocates the 'national approach': 'America is different, and that difference is defined in large part by its Anglo-Protestant culture and its religiosity. The alternative to cosmopolitanism and imperialism is nationalism devoted to the preservation and enhancement of those qualities that have defined America since its founding' (p. 365). One faction of the US elite wants the USA to become a cosmopolitan society. Another faction wishes it to assume an imperial role. But the American people are committed to 'preserving and strengthening the American identity that has existed for centuries' (p. 366).

Japan expert Chalmers Johnson, whose radically anti-imperial criticism of his own country started with opposition to the US bases in Okinawa, holds a similar view, although he does not go against cosmopolitanism or emphasize the importance of religiosity. Johnson would prefer revolution to religion. He thinks the USA has long been an empire, but only recently has it taken on a self-declared and highly militarist form. This may undermine the American Republic in the same way that the Roman conquests led to the fall of the Roman Republic and Julius Caesar's usurpation of power. Chalmers Johnson warns that four sorrows will befall the United States as a result of its present imperialist policy: endless war, loss of liberty, habitual official lying and bankruptcy (pp. 285, 306). Of these, he particularly laments the first three, since they undermine the US Constitution, but it is the bankruptcy that will certainly lead to crisis. Thomas Jefferson's old warning 'that when the government fears the people, there is liberty; when the people fear the

government, there is tyranny' (quoted in Johnson, p. 298) clearly applies. Chalmers Johnson does not have the same faith as Michael Mann in the American people's ability to stop the current drive towards militarist empire. The only hope is that the people retake control of Congress, reform it, turn it into a genuine assembly of democratic representatives and cut off the supply of money to the Pentagon and the secret intelligence agencies. He thinks, however, that it is already too late for such a revolution to happen. Instead the US empire will meet a tragic destiny: 'Nemesis, the goddess of retribution and vengeance, the punisher of pride and hubris, waits impatiently for her meeting with us' (p. 312).

Mann's and Chalmers Johnson's books are perhaps more impressive for their indignant polemic qualities than their analytic rigour. When we now move down to the lower right corner of the table we find two realist former political practitioners, whose prose is so terse and views so moderate that the quality of their writings hinges uniquely on analytical precision. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Joseph Nye, Jr, served in the Democratic administrations of Carter and Clinton, respectively, and both were considered hawks in their time. They now stand for caution. Former assistant secretary of defence Joseph Nye, Jr, has presented his views in a number of articles and books. Not unlike Michael Mann, he compares global power to a three-dimensional chess board. On the top board, military power is largely unipolar. On the next economic board, the United States is not a hegemon and must often bargain as an equal with Europe. On the third board, with 'soft power' exerted transnationally outside of the control of governments, power is widely dispersed, and it makes no sense to speak of unipolarity, multipolarity or hegemony. According to Nye, Washington must take all three boards into consideration, and this makes it imperative for the USA to avoid trying to go it alone. It needs partners. Nye is worried by the fact that the word 'empire' has come out of the closet. It makes no sense at all to speak of a 'unipolar world' or an 'American empire', he says, since this takes only the top chess board into consideration. The proponents of the new doctrines in the White House and the Pentagon are 'one-dimensional players in a three-dimensional game' (Nye, 2003: 66). The United States may be extremely powerful in comparison to the great empires of history, but it has less control over what occurs inside other countries than the British Empire had. Nye warns against using the term 'empire', even as a metaphor, since it implies a degree of control by Washington that is unrealistic and reinforces the prevailing temptations of unilateralism.

In *The Choice*, the hardcore realist analyst Zbigniew Brzezinski speaks of US hegemony and leadership, not empire. The US hegemony is a transient historical phase, which will sooner or later fade. Today, however, US power is an essential prerequisite to global stability. What the USA must do is to progressively transform its prevailing power into a 'co-optive hegemony –

one in which leadership is exercised more through shared conviction with enduring allies than by assertive domination' (pp. 217–218). Brzezinski does not hide his anti-populist, pro-European attitude: 'The president must do more than stir the American people; he must also educate them' (p. 219). It is critically important, he says, to foster a complementary and increasingly binding American–European global partnership. With such a partnership, America becomes a 'Superpower Plus'. Without the transatlantic alliance, the USA will be a 'Superpower Minus', and will find the costs of exercising its global leadership considerably higher. This will also make it more difficult for Europe to unite, since pro-Atlanticist countries (like Poland) will not support any anti-American platform (p. 220). Moreover, it is critically important for the United States to cooperate with Russia, China and Japan in stabilizing Central Asia and the Middle East. Brzezinski's preferred alternative is 'co-optive hegemony'.

Some readers may be surprised that Robert Kagan, known as a harsh critic of European postmodern idealism, also warns the USA against returning to 'empire'. Like Kaplan and Boot, he sets physical power at the core of his analysis. The peace that has prevailed in Europe since World War II, in combination with Europe's relative military weakness vis-à-vis the United States and Russia, has softened the Europeans to the extent of making them unable to exert real power. Europeans suffer from the illusion that a global order can be built on multilateral cooperation. Kagan praises the United States for having maintained its capacity for using power, but warns against imperial rhetoric. In his debate with Niall Ferguson at the American Enterprise Institute, Kagan declared himself in complete disagreement with the pro-imperial view: The USA is not an empire, only an exceptionally powerful great power, he claimed. Its exceptional power, moreover, is partially explained by the fact that it is not imperial. Robert Kagan's bestseller *Of Paradise and Power*, in which he famously compares the USA to Mars and Europe to Venus, never calls the USA imperial. It lauds the USA's readiness to intervene militarily against rogue regimes and in failed states, but does not view this as an imperial practice. In his debate with Ferguson, Kagan insisted that the USA's power builds mainly on voluntary cooperation and treaty-based alliances. The USA is a *hegemonic* power, not an empire. It would not only be factually incorrect, but also a catastrophic strategic mistake, said Kagan, to declare the USA an empire. An imperial power is defined by seeking to exercise dominion over others, and this is exactly what the USA has avoided, to the great benefit of the world and itself. In an article in spring of 2004, Kagan called for a 'new trans-Atlantic bargain', brokered by NATO. The solution would not be an empire, but that the USA grant Europeans 'some influence over the exercise of its power'.

Conclusion

The current US hegemony is certainly resented by many people – and governments – all over the world. Still, it is not sufficiently intolerable for other nations to start preparing for an arms race or to gang up against Washington. However, this might easily happen if the United States were to establish a system of lasting formal control, backed up by bases, in strategically located countries, such as Iraq. To prevent this from happening, it is important to continue warning against the imperial temptation, both internationally and in the United States itself. Empire is a temptation, not an obligation. There should be sufficient basis in the cost-consciousness of Hamiltonians, the exceptionalism of Jeffersonians, the dedication to peace among Wilsonians, the concern about overstretch among Jacksonians and the cautiousness of classic realists to see that the USA should not become an empire. Nye, Brzezinski and Kagan are right. Boot, Kaplan and Ferguson are wrong. Yet the best and most readable of all of the books on review here is Ferguson's *Colossus*. Read it, be provoked, but don't let yourself be convinced!

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