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AMERICAN HEGEMONY: PREVENTIVE WAR, IRAQ, AND IMPOSING DEMOCRACY

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Editor's Foreword: Some Early Lessons

DEMETRIOS JAMES CARALEY

The purpose of *American Hegemony* is to bring within one volume essays that examine the post-September 11 “Bush doctrine,” which declares that as the world’s sole remaining superpower—or hegemon—the United States has the right to launch preventive wars against any nation in order to end a military or terrorist threat that might materialize in the future. Under this doctrine, the U.S. also assumes responsibility for converting as many nondemocratic nations as possible to democracies. Implementing this last responsibility, the doctrine’s defenders argue, will bring many benefits: the people of those currently non-democratic nations will gain a better life; tyrannical, rogue states once converted to democracies will have no incentive to develop weapons of mass destruction that might be a threat to the United States; and democratic states will have no tolerance for terrorist groups that might organize and launch attacks from their soil.

This volume is a sequel to *September 11, Terrorist Attacks, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, published by the Academy of Political Science in the summer of 2002. In the Overview to that work, Alexander Cooley and I showed concern, first, that President Bush’s 2002 State of the Union message, which defined as an “axis of evil” Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, defocused the real war on the September 11 terrorists and second, that the preventive war doctrine that President Bush first made public in the 2002 graduation exercises at West Point might antagonize many allies if it were to be implemented.¹ Now that preventive war is a reality, it remains to be seen whether the impact of the 2003–2004 Iraq war will cause anti-American terrorist attacks to increase or decrease and whether

¹ Demetrios James Caraley, ed., *September 11, Terrorist Attacks, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: The Academy of Political Science, 2002), 14.

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other Arab and Muslim states as well as traditional European allies will cooperate more or less with our intelligence agencies to frustrate new attacks on the United States. What has already been seen in the two and one-half years since September 11, 2001 is that the almost worldwide view of the United States as a victim of terrorism that deserved the world's sympathy and support has given way to a widespread vision of America as an imperial power that has defied world opinion through the unjustified and unilateral use of military force. In this foreword, I paint in very broad strokes some troubling implications of the doctrine of world hegemony and some very early lessons that might be drawn from the preventive war launched in the spring of 2003 against Iraq, reporting also on some events that took place after the essays in the book went to press. As of this writing, eleven months after the declaration of military victory, internal security is still weak, as suicide bombers and remnants of the Hussein regime carry out, seemingly at will, attacks against coalition forces. They also attack and kill, again seemingly at will, Iraqis seen to be cooperating with American forces, such as the newly organized Iraqi police and even neutrals like UN and Red Cross staff, causing those organizations to withdraw their helpful personnel from Iraq. There have been three major suicide attacks on Shiite mosques during major high holy days; the last attack, on March 2nd, caused the deaths of some 200 Iraqis in a single day.² The attacks continue even though the United States, to show that it does not intend to stay as a permanent occupier, has agreed to transfer sovereignty to an Iraqi authority by 30 June 2004. The following are, in my judgment, some early lessons to be drawn and should be read as being prefaced by the words "in my opinion" or "so far."

THE UNITED STATES AS THE SOLE REMAINING SUPERPOWER IS NOT INVINCIBLE OR IRRESISTIBLE

The view of the United States as the world's sole remaining superpower seemed to be confirmed by its quick and easy victory over Iraq's organized military forces. Once again, it was also confirmed that American superpower is primarily the power to destroy and, at the extreme, to create chaos but not necessarily to assure compliance with its will, even after it proclaimed military victory. When victory was announced in May of 2003, there was virtually no security for the Iraqi people except in the northern, Kurdish areas. Basic services, such as water and electricity, had been cut, and hospitals, schools, factories, museums, and offices had been looted. Coalition forces that relied so heavily and successfully on air attacks with smart bombs, Special Forces, tanks, and other heavy weapons were unable to restore security. In part, this was because the Pentagon never had in their military plan the possibility that the Iraqi military

² John F. Burns, "At Least 143 Die in Attacks At Two Sacred Sites in Iraq," *New York Times*, 3 March 2004. After the publication of this article, it was reported that around 200 people had been killed.

would simply dissolve and some of it re-emerge as guerrilla fighters, and there were not enough coalition ground troops to saturate the Sunni triangle and stop the attacks. Before the war was launched, the chief of staff of the Army, General Eric Shinseki, warned that “several hundred thousand” U.S. troops would be required to secure Iraq against internal opposition. Shinseki was sharply criticized by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and others at the Pentagon, who incorrectly decided that peaceful occupation could be established with less than half of that force. General Shinseki was then forced out of his post.³

With respect to exhibiting military invincibility, again, as in the 1991 Gulf war, the war against Serbia, and the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, this quick U.S. military victory was scored over a fourth-rate power without an air force, navy, or sophisticated antiaircraft or antimissile defenses. If there were to be a war against real military powers, like China, Russia, France, Germany, India, Japan, or even North Korea, U.S. military victory would be uncertain and there might be military retaliation against the American homeland. In short, the Iraqi war proved only that U.S. military superiority can be guaranteed against small states that lack nuclear weapons, and even that does not guarantee that after victory over a state's military forces, there will be compliance by the defeated state and opposition attacks will stop. Small states can also draw a different lesson from this scenario—that developing or buying a few nuclear bombs would act as a deterrent to the possibility of a U.S. preventive attack and therefore spur, instead of curb, proliferation. It is important to understand these caveats because there is a danger that continuous proclamations about the U.S. being the world's sole remaining superpower might lead to delusions among American officials and the American people that the United States can go to war against any power on earth and score a quick victory with few casualties.

THE UNITED STATES CANNOT SUCCEED MILITARILY WHEN “GOING IT ALONE”

The fact that the Iraq war was opposed by all of the U.S.'s traditional allies, except Britain, Italy, Spain, and some smaller, new American partners, does not prove the dictum that the United States can win even if it has to go it virtually alone. In reality, even against a weak state like Iraq, the U.S. did not go it alone. It used military bases and received overflight permissions from many of its traditional allies in NATO and on the Arab peninsula who were strongly against the war. The major military hospital where all seriously wounded American soldiers were sent for more sophisticated treatment than could be offered in field hospitals was in Landstuhl, Germany, despite that nation's vociferous opposition to the Iraq war.

³ David Rieff, “Blueprint for a Mess,” *New York Times*, 2 November 2003.

The United States maintains some 725 military and naval installations abroad⁴ that are integral to the U.S. being able to deploy, supply, and resupply American ground, air, and naval forces over 6,000 miles from its shores.

How responsibly the United States chooses to exercise its superpower affects the deference and respect that it will be accorded by other nations and international organizations. The more alienated other nations feel by an exercise of American unilateralism over their objections, the more likely it is that they may start denying the U.S. even tacit cooperation. Turkey, for example, refused to allow American military forces to cross its territory to invade northern Iraq or even to use the major American air base at Incirlik.

U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTIONS AGAINST ROGUE STATES AND TYRANNIES WILL NOT GUARANTEE THE RISE OF DEMOCRACIES

At the outset of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the United States claimed its intelligence showed that there would be only a short war and that quickly following the war, a democracy would be successfully imposed. This was to be a pro-Western democracy supportive of U.S. policies, and this new Iraqi democracy would become a pillar—an oil-rich pillar—of security for the U.S. in the Middle East.

This vision proved to be a mirage. Especially because of the complete collapse of security and basic services to the civilian population, the United States failed to generate good will even among those Iraqis who hated Saddam. Even when services and security were partially restored, an Iraqi governing council established, and movement for transferring sovereignty was underway, the differences among Kurdish, Sunni, and Shia Iraqis prevented any quick agreement as to how a new, permanent government should be organized.⁵ Those Iraqi factions who thought that they would be electoral minorities were opposed to having a transitional government elected and functioning only by simple majority rule, much as the less-populous American states did while creating a new constitution in 1787. At the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, those less-populous states insisted as “the price of union”⁶ on adding to the original proposal of a single-chamber legislature with representation based on population, a second chamber with equal representation for each state. Also, to further prevent sheer democratic “tyranny of the majority” from arising, the new constitution provided for an independent judiciary and a written constitution that established certain liberties and rights as supreme law of the land, which were not changeable by ordinary legislative majorities.

Democracies require very special social, historical, and economic prerequisites, including the cultural values of being willing to compromise and to accept unpopular decisions when they come from a legitimate process. It is as yet un-

⁴ Joshua Micah Marshall, “Power Rangers,” *The New Yorker*, 2 February 2004, 84.

⁵ Chibli Mallat, “East Meets West, at Least on Paper,” *New York Times*, 11 March 2004.

⁶ See Herbert Agar, *The Price of Union* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).

known how tightly the Iraqi civilian population will embrace the plan for democratization and the rule of law, especially considering the deep divisions among Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. Furthermore, insurgents are systematically assassinating Kurdish, Shiite, and even Sunni political leaders, professors, and other intellectual elites in order to undercut the leadership needed to operate a democracy.⁷ Their objective is, precisely, to prevent the organization of a stable, new, democratic Iraqi government.

Even when elections are held and a de jure democracy is organized, it seems clear that the United States will have to de facto occupy Iraq for an indeterminate period of time and absorb continued deaths and other casualties among its forces in order to provide backup to an indigenous Iraqi police and army. There is as yet no evidence that even if a new democratic Iraq can be established, it will serve as a “beacon” of democracy and freedom in the Middle East, resulting in the people of other nondemocracies in the region demanding democracies of their own. Nor is there evidence that such a movement would always be desirable for the United States—as it might not be in Jordan, if its monarchy were to be replaced by a majority-rule, fundamentalist Islamic republic.

IN PURSUING WHAT WILL BE A PERPETUAL “WAR ON TERRORISM”
INCLUDING LAUNCHING PREVENTIVE WARS, WE MAY BE
WEAKENING THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY AT HOME

The case made to Congress for a resolution authorizing the use of force in Iraq has been shown to have been based on false and misleading readings of intelligence reports.⁸ On the basis of those reports, the administration claimed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction that could be given to terrorists to be used against the U.S., that Saddam Hussein was connected with the attacks of September 11, and that the Iraqis so hated their government that they would immediately welcome American forces as liberators and not see them as an army of occupation with plans to “steal” Iraq’s oil.

Through a joint resolution that authorized the president in the broadest terms “to use the Armed Forces of the United States as he determines to be necessary and appropriate in order to defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq,”⁹ majorities in Congress transferred to the president the power to decide whether and when the United States would go to war. Not only did Congress in effect abdicate its constitutional rights in the Iraq resolution, but it did so in haste, without sufficient debate and deliberation and over strong arguments that the case against Iraq had not been proven. The haste was the result of the president arguing that the

⁷ Jeffrey Gettleman, “The Struggle for Iraq: Killings; Assassinations Tear Into Iraq’s Educated Class,” *New York Times*, 7 February 2004.

⁸ Douglas Jehl, “Weapons: U.S., Certain That Iraq Had Illicit Arms, Reportedly Ignored Contrary Reports,” *New York Times*, 6 March 2004.

⁹ House Joint Resolution 114, Use of Force, 11 October 2002.

danger was increasing daily and of the congressional leadership wanting, for a variety of reasons, to get the vote “out of the way” before the 2002 midterm elections.

It would have been inconceivable to our Framers that congressional leaders would have abdicated their constitutional powers essentially for reasons of convenience. The Founders were all ambitious politicians, jealously guarding their prerogatives, and they expected their successors to be the same. Madison wrote in *The Federalist*, No. 51 that they counted on this ambition to control overreaching branches:

Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? . . . In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.¹⁰

Not all members of Congress were willing to roll over. Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, the Senate’s senior constitutional expert, challenged at length both the wisdom and constitutionality of the war resolution.¹¹ Nevertheless, majorities in Congress, including a Democratic majority in the Senate, did not heed the warnings. Among the Senate majority was the leading Democratic aspirant to the presidency in 2004, who voted for the resolution but later turned against the war, claiming that he had not been given accurate information and intelligence. Other notable senators, however, including Democrats Edward Kennedy, Patrick Leahy, Paul Wellstone, Carl Levin, Barbara Boxer, and Bob Graham; Republican Lincoln Chaffee; and sole Independent James Jeffords, felt they had enough information to justify voting “no.”

By launching a war without having convinced majorities in Congress of the case’s merits—as opposed to claiming support on the basis of party loyalty and “not being soft on terrorism”—the president not only violated the spirit of the Constitution but also lost the intellectual advantage of a give-and-take with officials who were independently elected and not beholden to him. From informed members of Congress, especially those serving on the Joint Intelligence, Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Relations committees, the president could have gained fresh perspectives to balance those generated and debated by his subordinates in the secret recesses of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the National Security Council, the CIA, and the State Department. It was such a failure of past presidents to consult more broadly and to rely instead on executive branch “groupthink” that played a large part in the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco

¹⁰ James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, No. 51.

¹¹ Senator Robert C. Byrd, “Threats and Responses: Excerpts of Speeches Made on Senate Floor Regarding Resolution on Iraq,” *New York Times*, 4 October 2002.

and in the disastrous decisions starting in 1964 to expand the war in Vietnam.¹² It appears that it was this kind of “groupthink” that prevented intelligence officers who had a different take on the danger of Iraq from getting their views to the top decision makers in the executive branch and in Congress.¹³

In exit polls during the early 2004 primary elections for choosing a Democratic presidential nominee, the issue of the war was deemed by the voters to be less important than jobs, health care, and education.¹⁴ If how the U.S. went to war in 2003 against Iraq becomes accepted as a legitimate precedent, we run this risk: any president could find misleading and allegedly very confidential intelligence with which to frighten Congress into giving him some authority for using the military against “terrorism” (or even worse, claim that he could do so on his own, as part of his inherent power as Commander in Chief).¹⁵ Furthermore, having an all-volunteer military force means that no great part of the public will be concerned about the danger to themselves or their children of being drafted to serve in the war and object, as they did during the Vietnam War. Finally, funding the war entirely by issuance of debt instead of by raising taxes keeps the broad general public from complaining because of a financial pinch.

Another element that may be weakening our traditional constitutional democracy is the wide range of powers given to the attorney general right after the attacks of September 11 by the USA PATRIOT Act.¹⁶ Among other things, this legislation gave the Justice Department the authority to monitor communications by phone and by email of anyone at any time and to incarcerate even American citizens arrested on American soil by designating them as “enemy combatants.” Clearly, some of this authority is necessary for detecting and incapacitating terrorists in the U.S. and foiling their plans to launch attacks. But to apprehend an American citizen within the U.S. and hold him indefinitely, without filing charges against him, without giving him access to a lawyer, and without allowing him to apply for

¹² See Irving Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos* (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1983) and David Halberstram, *The Best and The Brightest* (Random House: New York, 1972).

¹³ Jehl, “Weapons,” and Seymour Hersh, “The Stovepipe,” *The New Yorker*, 27 October 2003, 77–87.

¹⁴ Robin Toner, “Whoever is Chosen, Democrats Spoil for a Fight,” *New York Times*, 30 January 2004.

¹⁵ Alexander Hamilton explained in *The Federalist Papers*, No. 69 that there is a clear distinction intended between the president’s powers as commander-in-chief and the power of Congress to declare war. “The President is to be commander-in-chief of the army and navy of the United States. In this respect his authority would be nominally the same with that of the king of Great Britain, but in substance much inferior to it. It would amount to nothing more than the supreme command and direction of the military and naval forces, as first General and admiral of the Confederacy; while that of the British king extends to the DECLARING of war and to the RAISING and REGULATING of fleets and armies, all which, by the Constitution under consideration, would appertain to the legislature.” As shown by Hamilton, the Founders designed our government so that the president as commander-in-chief would not be endowed with the power to declare war and raise and regulate military forces.

¹⁶ The Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (USA Patriot Act), P.L. 107-05, 115 Stat. 2721.

a writ of habeas corpus, is a major departure from the protections of the Bill of Rights. Fortunately, as of this writing, very few Americans have been so detained, and the Supreme Court has agreed to take the matter up for consideration in its Spring 2004 session.

WHAT IS AHEAD?

Realistically, the United States cannot leave Iraq before it has a stable government that can provide good internal security and some capacity to protect itself against foreign foes. It was the United States that claimed it could deliver major benefits to the Iraqi people. It is as yet unknown and unknowable how long an American security presence will be necessary in Iraq. As explained earlier, even with the U.S.'s presence there, there has been a failure to squelch violence not only against coalition armed forces but also against foreign contractors, ethnic and religious factions, major Shiite mosques, hotels, and Iraqi police stations and police training facilities. Indeed, more Iraqis have been killed by these attacks than coalition forces. Richard Betts, a preeminent scholar on terrorism,¹⁷ has written:

Guerrilla attacks and assassinations in this postconventional phase of the war can profit tactically from the advantage of choosing the time and place to engage isolated elements of the U.S. military. The attackers may evade capture with the assistance of the civilian population if the latter simply refuse to inform on them to the Americans. Such civilian cooperation may flow from identification with the resistance, or from fear of being killed by the resistance if they cooperate with the occupation. Terror thus plays a role in limiting the intelligence available to the American counterinsurgency forces. . . .

Many of the challenges and dilemmas of counterterrorism in Iraq are represented in the ongoing postconventional phases of the war in Afghanistan as well. To defeat the resistance movements, the counterinsurgents must convince the populations to dry up the sea in which the insurgent fish swim, to provide timely information that allows rapid action to find and eliminate the resistance organization. In Iraq, that means convincing the population that the occupation forces will leave them with their own government, one better than the Baathists trying to make a comeback. It also means convincing the populations—especially the indigenous police, militia, and other organizations—that if they collaborate with the occupation and the new governments that follow it, they will be protected against reprisals by the resistance. The record of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency in other cases is sufficiently mixed that neither success nor failure in the current cases can be guaranteed.¹⁸

In his memoirs, former President George H. W. Bush argued that he did not send ground forces to occupy Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein after having driven

¹⁷ See Richard Betts, "Surprise Despite Warning: Why Sudden Attacks Succeed," *Political Science Quarterly* 95 (Winter 1980–81): 551–572, and "The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy: Tactical Advantages of Terror" in Demetrios James Caraley, ed., *September 11, Terrorist Attacks, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: The Academy of Political Science, 2002), 33–50.

¹⁸ Private communication to the writer, 30 December 2003.

Iraqi military forces out of Kuwait in the 1991 Gulf War because he believed the U.S. would have wound up being “an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land.”¹⁹ Having the U.S. leave the Iraqis in the lurch now in order to prevent further casualties could precipitate a civil war along ethnic and religious lines. A civil war in Iraq would be disastrous to the entire region and might draw in other nations, such as Iran, Turkey, and Syria, as well as more al-Qaeda-type terrorists.

To create a stable Iraq, the United States will need to enlist the support of the United Nations, our historical allies, and the Muslim nations in the Middle East. It is difficult now to gain assistance from those governments and organizations whose advice the U.S. did not abide by prior to the invasion, and indeed showed contempt for. But there is an underlying, even if unspoken, common interest to appeal to. If the UN and other nations do not help with the security and economic problems in Iraq, and it remains perilous for U.S. forces to stay there, the U.S. may be tempted to remove them. Were that to happen, there would probably be devastating levels of chaos and violence in the Middle East that would, in turn, disrupt most of the world, because it is in the Middle East that much of the world's oil supply originates. If the Middle East erupts into chaos, only the true terrorists—al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and their religious and tactical allies—will benefit. They have already profited by the war in Iraq having drawn energy, attention, and Special Forces away from northwest Afghanistan where the true September 11 terrorists were based. Because of force used in Iraq, the U.S. has also increased the number of angry Muslims who may attack Americans both in the Middle East and in the United States. But having to use the threat of withdrawing from Iraq, even if only implicitly, as leverage to garner the support of allies and international organizations is far from ideal for enhancing the U.S.'s reputation as a responsible and fair hegemon. The United States was seen as a responsible, fair, and trustworthy hegemon by its Western allies and much of the rest of the world from the end of World War II to the collapse of the Soviet empire. And the United States as a hegemon that is seen as responsible, fair, and trustworthy is more necessary than ever in the post-September 11 world.

One possible silver lining is that the United States will heed as an expensive lesson its experience in Iraq in 2003–2004 and will not repeat it. Specifically, it might learn not to embark on war so rapidly when the threat to the U.S. is remote in time and place, the intelligence reports are murky and inconclusive, the cost of the war is substantial, and the international community fails to see the threat and thus refuses to provide support. Another good lesson to be learned is that the human and monetary costs of a war may turn out to be many times greater than originally projected, especially if, as is inevitable, the war

¹⁹ George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (Knopf: New York, 1998), 489–490.

takes costly turns that were not originally foreseen. The final lesson is to also have a plausible exit strategy, particularly if the war doesn't go according to optimistic predictions.²⁰

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²⁰ President George H. W. Bush is reported to have asked during the run-up to the war, "But do they have an exit strategy?" Michiko Kakutani, "Father, Son, Freud and Oedipus," *New York Times*, 29 March 2004.