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## AMERICAN HEGEMONY: PREVENTIVE WAR, IRAQ, AND IMPOSING DEMOCRACY

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# Introduction

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In the seemingly ever-present debates over the "American empire," the wished-for payoffs from "imperialism," and the lessons to be learned from supposedly "small wars," the focus has usually been on foreign lands Americans and their governments are targeting rather than the effects of the "empire" on Americans and their political societies at home. Alexis de Tocqueville was uncomfortably correct in many of his warnings about the future of American democracy. It is possible, however, to be less fearful than he but yet to worry nevertheless over his famous formulation that the democracy stood less chance of being undone by "victorious generals . . . after the manner of Sulla and Caesar" than by the people's own search for security: "all those who seek to destroy the liberties of a democratic nation ought to know that war is the surest and the shortest means to accomplish it. This is the first axiom of the science."[1]

The essays in this volume, written by some of our most respected and articulate scholars, deserve to be at the center of the debate over "American empire" precisely for the reasons Tocqueville set out nearly 170 years ago. They explore the

[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), I: 268–269. For contemporary versions of Tocqueville's concern, note Elaine Tyler May, "Echoes of the Cold War: The Aftermath of September 11 at Home," in Mary L. Dudziak, ed., *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 35–54; and Amy Kaplan, "Homeland Insecurities: Transformation of Language and Space," Ibid., 55–69. Various points of the debate over "American empire" are helpfully brought together in Andrew J. Bacevich, ed., *The Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of American Empire* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 2003), and typified by the front-page story on historian Bernard Lewis, Peter Waldman, "A Historian's Take on Islam Steers U.S. in Terrorism Fight," *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 February 2004, as well as by Niall Ferguson's many attempts to convince readers that Americans should embrace their "empire" as the rightful heir to the British Empire and its long-set sun's cold glow; note, for example, his "The Empire Slinks Back," *New York Times Magazine*, 27 April 2003.

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center of the ongoing discussion over how the world's only superpower should define and act out its role in the world. This debate has deep roots. As Tocqueville's writings predicted, the attacks of September 11 only accelerated arguments that go back more than two centuries. The horror of the events in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania, however, did make Americans finally aware that they had long been involved in foreign policies that could cost them their lives as well as their dollars. Those events radically changed the environment in which American foreign policy was defined, discussed, and formulated, while providing the consensus, not apparent before that point, for the use of massive military force, if necessary, to create an "American empire."

In the 1990s, during the rush of triumphalism that affected both American political debate and scholarship, fewer than 10 percent of those polled (and sometimes fewer than 5 percent) could name a national security issue of importance to them. By October 2001, however, 90 percent supported President George W. Bush's policies—policies he defined as not only aiming to destroy terrorist networks but also moving globally to attack, if necessary, sovereign states harboring terrorists.[2] The public's support gave him one of the broadest informal mandates in recent American history for an active, militaristic foreign policy, and probably the broadest since Congress and the American people seemed to rally around President Harry Truman's 1947 doctrine of containing totalitarianism (read: communism) wherever it tried to push out.

If this volume's essays are important because of their relevance and special contributions to the ongoing debate, they are also notable because most are marked by a pessimism—or, to use a more neutral term, a realism. The main thrust of post–September 11 coverage, especially in the mainstream U.S. media, has been on the why and how of the American military efforts in Afghanistan and the Middle East, with some attention given to military commitments in areas such as the Philippines and central Asia. Considerable attention has also been paid to the response by other powers, above all, France, Germany, and members of the United Nations Security Council. These stories are usually those of American success, quick military triumphs over Afghanistan and Iraqi resistance, effective deployments in other areas, and successful defiance of nations that attempted to slow up the pace of the march. These mainstream debates are obviously important. By focusing on U.S. military power and on the effects of the Bush administration's policies overseas, however, the debates are also too narrow and too safe. The overwhelming superiority that the nation's military enjoys over any combination of other national forces is indisputable and can be clearly measured by noting how the U.S. military budget more than matches the next dozen highest such budgets in the world. American forces effortlessly cut through Iraqi defenses (even given the accuracy of one observer's comment that "we were at war with the

[2] See Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2003), 48 for quotes from the so-called Bush doctrine and the context. Also note Robert Jervis, "Understanding the Bush Doctrine," in this volume.

Flintstones").[3] In Afghanistan, it was also true that the U.S. military won a quick victory because of its close working relationship with the Northern Alliance, a collection of warlords' forces that were effective, but, as it turned out, not interested in either American-style democracy or working with a Washington-imposed regime. Certainly the one-time allies of the Northern Alliance failed to see the attractions of a long-term American empire in their home areas.[4] But the U.S. effort in Afghanistan was, nevertheless, as the Bush administration defined it and most Americans believed, a significant victory.

So why should this volume's essays be pessimistic? Because they go well beyond the military victories to ask the necessary next and more complex questions about Washington's plans (or lack thereof) for the reconstruction, stabilization, and even democratization of the invaded countries. The invasions of Afghanistan to some degree, and of Iraq to a greater degree, have been justified on the grounds of destroying rogue regimes who harbored terrorists and/or had designs to use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and replacing them with democracies that (again according to the conventional wisdom) are less interested in waging wars.

These essays, then, are important because they go beyond Americans' beliefs in their military security to deal with the inevitable questions of what has to follow economically and politically. But they are especially important because many of them focus on the United States, where the decisions are made about the political and economic follow-through, and where (at least according to the Constitution) officials who make war and claim the power for making the peace are to be held responsible by the U.S. Congress and the people who elect it. As Tocqueville indicated, moreover, in a protracted conflict, it would be the American homeland, not an overseas locale, where the most important question of all—the viability of this particular democracy—would be decided.

Robert Jervis defines the broad background for this struggle at home by exploring the implications of the Bush doctrine abroad. The U.S. response to September 11, he argues, emanated, in part, from how great powers usually act, how they define the world (their "neighborhoods"), and how effectively they use their political and military might. "All this means that under the Bush doctrine, the United States is not a status quo power," he concludes. Instead, "the combination of power, fear, and perceived opportunity leads it to reshape world politics and the societies of many of its members." The last seven words of that formulation also force the reader to consider the effect such an effort has on the politics and society of the nation doing the reshaping. The remainder of the essays, indeed, deal with different aspects of that seven-word phrase.

Louis Fisher is the most incisive, comprehensive, concerned, and published analyst of that phrase as it relates to how waging war and creating an "empire"

[3] Daalder and Lindsay, *America Unbound*, 147.

[4] An important and, again, deeply pessimistic discussion of Afghanistan two years after the overthrow of the Taliban is found in Ahmed Rashid, "The Mess in Afghanistan," *New York Review of Books*, 12 February 2004, 24–27.

changes, sometimes for the worse, the U.S. constitutional system.[5] Among other contributions, he notes here how in the twenty-first-century wars against terrorism, intelligence information is crucial and how corrupted intelligence can lead not only to corrupted policy but also to corrupt constitutional processes. Fisher's conclusion is unequivocal: "U.S. political institutions failed in their constitutional duties when they authorized war against Iraq." As is too often the case in the making of modern American foreign relations, the failure of constitutional restraints on the exercise of war powers was due in important respects to the failure of the media to present accurate or sufficiently full analyses of events.

Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis provide a highly important dissection, and in parts condemnation, of how the media misinformed the American public after September 11. Some parts of the media, especially the Fox Network, appear more guilty than others. The authors further contend that "the public had so many of these misperceptions" of what was occurring, and who was responsible, because "the Bush administration made numerous statements that could easily be construed as asserting these falsehoods"—not least in its interpretation of intelligence estimates about Iraqi ties to al-Qaeda terrorists. Thus, a misinformation loop was formed: the administration's misleading statements were picked up by media, which uncritically repeated them and thus misinformed the public and its elected officials who, in Fisher's formulation, not surprisingly failed to exercise proper restraints on the administration's war powers. One of the stunning conclusions in the essay is that Americans pay considerably more attention to the news than pundits have believed. The problem is less in the viewers than in what they viewed. Or to underline the famous dictum, the point was not that the medium was the message, but that the medium corrupted the message. And in a modern democracy, the implications of such corruption are especially far-reaching and ominous.

Andrew Flibbert notes that the phrase at the center of the heated and politically inflammable debate over the major reason the Bush administration offered for invading Iraq, the weapons of mass destruction, has become less a scientific or technical phrase than "a distinctly political term." While U.S. officials "never refer to the U.S. military's development, possession, and potential use of WMD," the phrase is used "with the clear purpose of describing the kinds of weapons that American adversaries may seek." Flibbert's questioning that the WMD genie can never again be put "back in its early twentieth-century bottle" and—more importantly—his argument that democracies known for supposedly not wanting to fight are willing in reality to sacrifice a great deal in order to obtain such weapons are highly significant. His probing adds an important dimension to Jervis's international arena, while providing a crucial set of examples to support the theses of the previous two essays.

[5] In regard to his arguments in this volume, note especially Louis Fisher, *Constitutional Conflicts Between Congress and the President* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1997); Louis Fisher and Nada Mourtada-Sabbah, *Is War a Political Question?* (Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2001); and Louis Fisher, *Presidential War Power* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

The success of U.S. foreign policy will depend not only on the effectiveness with which the nation's power is used, but, at necessary times, with the restraint that Americans place on that power. Joseph S. Nye, Jr. spells out components of that power, the "hard" military as well as, in his well-known formulation, the "soft" cultural and economic power the United States exercises globally (too often with its citizens not understanding the sometimes unwelcome consequences of that exercise of soft power in various parts of the world). Sections of this essay, and most of the next by Charles A. Kupchan, argue that the restraint on U.S. power will be imposed by other nations if it is not imposed by Americans. While some experts see China as the potential leader of opposition to Washington's leadership, Kupchan argues that a cohesive Europe will be better positioned to take such a lead. He worries that American behavior might lead "other nations to rally against rather than with U.S. power." More precisely, he fears that such an alignment, along with other developments his essay outlines, will inevitably result in "a diminishing appetite for liberal internationalism" in the United States. This liberal internationalism has been the dynamic ideological center of the nation's power since World War II, but the appetite for it can also be diminished by the overreach of the Bush doctrine (as Jervis indicates), disillusionment with Congress and the media (as Fisher and Kull-Ramsay-Lewis emphasize), and the misunderstanding of the nature and limits of U.S. power (as Flibbert and Nye observe.)

The world in which American power operates is not only incredibly complex, but, as Samuel Huntington concludes, it is complex because it is also local. That is, the problems with which U.S. power is involved can be far removed and deeply isolated from the cultural and political assumptions that guide most Americans. Democracy, Huntington argues, is not imposed by outsiders but only—if they are lucky (for example, by having bad leaders die at an appropriate moment)—by the indigenous population. Nor, he emphasizes, has democracy in the recent past evolved when even a superpower might desire, but as part of a long cycle, a "wave," over which Americans have little control. Along with the external restraints on U.S. empire building that Jervis, Kupchan, and Nye underline, Huntington adds the complicated transformation taking place in other societies which Washington officials often do not understand, let alone guide.

One of the most instructive examples of how even a superpower cannot control such internal processes is the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Fareed Zakaria believes that many of the problems U.S. officials have had to deal with since September 11, especially those posed by Islamic fundamentalism, began after the upheaval in Iran. Resembling Huntington, Zakaria asks how the transition to democracy can work, especially in the Middle East, and what role Americans can play. Also resembling Huntington, his answer is that any transformation will be determined primarily within the local societies. He emphasizes that "economic reforms must come first, for they are fundamental." Zakaria's formulation is highly important, not least because he undermines the popular assumptions of Americans and some of their leaders that democracy involves mainly the development of a political process. Such processes have resulted in some of the century's worst rulers. As Zaka-

ria has argued elsewhere in detail, such political processes are much less important than the power of a legitimate legal system and the institutionalization of the law along with democratic checks and balances, not least in the economic realm.[6]

Americans like to think that democracy is not difficult to practice (even if many of them often do not participate in that practice) and thus is a universal good that others can also easily enjoy. The ghost of Woodrow Wilson's happy if ahistorical faith that if the world can only be made safe for democracy, democracy will easily follow, refuses, unfortunately, to die. Americans want to share such faith (defined in one important source as being based on the evidence of things not seen), and they make such easy assumptions in part because their economic base has allowed their peculiar kind of democracy to evolve since at least the 1830s. This collection of essays raises the central questions of whether Americans can continue to maintain such a system in the face of the terror, distortions, corrupted intelligence, ideological media, and international complexities that they have had to confront since the September 11th attacks. Once again, Tocqueville's prediction is tested.

[6] Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003).