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The Empire Strikes Out The “New Imperialism” and Its Fatal Flaws

by Ivan Eland

Executive Summary

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, several commentators have advanced the idea of security through empire. They claim that the best way to protect the United States in the 21st century is to emulate the British, Roman, and other empires of the past. The logic behind the idea is that if the United States can consolidate the international system under its enlightened hegemony, America will be both safer and more prosperous. Although the word “empire” is not used, the Bush administration’s ambitious new National Security Strategy seems to embrace the notion of neoimperialism.

The idea, however, ignores the fact that today’s world bears little resemblance to the one over which Britain or Rome once presided. Two differences are obvious: First, the world is far more interconnected today, which makes the consequences of sanctimonious, arrogant, or clumsy international behavior riskier politically, diplomatically, and economically. Second, the

potential costs associated with making enemies today are far greater than they were for empires past. Indeed, the British and the Romans were the targets of assassinations, arson, and other forms of anti-imperial backlash, but that activity was typically small-scale and took place far from the mother country. Forms of backlash today, in contrast, could be large-scale and directed at America’s homeland.

Most of all, the strategy of empire is likely to overstretch and bleed America’s economy and its military and federal budgets, and the overextension could hasten the decline of the United States as a superpower, as it did the Soviet Union and Great Britain. The strategy could also have the opposite effect from what its proponents claim it would have; that is, it would alarm other nations and peoples and thus provoke counterbalancing behavior and create incentives for other nations to acquire weapons of mass destruction as an insurance policy against American military might.

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Introduction

In the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, several foreign policy observers have concluded that America should look to the vanished empires of the past for foreign policy guidance, not because the strategy of empire should be scrupulously avoided, but because the strategy of empire should be unabashedly embraced.¹ Perhaps the most outspoken advocate of this view is Max Boot of the Council on Foreign Relations and former *Wall Street Journal* editorial features editor. The September 11 attacks, says Boot, were “the result of insufficient American involvement and ambition; the solution is to be more expansive in our goals and more assertive in our implementation.”² Boot holds up the 19th-century British Empire as an example of what he has in mind: “Afghanistan and other troubled lands today cry out for the sort of enlightened foreign administration once provided by self-confident Englishmen in jodhpurs and pith helmets.”³

Another advocate of empire is *Washington Post* columnist Sebastian Mallaby. He says that “the logic of neoimperialism is too compelling . . . to resist. The chaos of the world is too threatening to ignore, and existing methods for dealing with that chaos have been tried and found wanting.”⁴ He therefore calls for an “imperialist revival” wherein orderly societies, led by the United States, can and should take a page from the past and “impose their own institutions on disorderly ones.”⁵

The most sophisticated argument in favor of empire, however, comes from *Atlantic Monthly* correspondent Robert Kaplan. Kaplan says that American policymakers should turn to chroniclers of the Greek, Roman, and British empires for helpful hints about how to run American foreign policy. “Our future leaders could do worse than be praised for their . . . ability to bring prosperity to distant parts of the world under America’s soft imperial influence,” writes Kaplan, and “Rome, in particular, is a model for hegemonic power, using various means to encourage a modicum of order in a disorderly world.”⁶

Holding to that theme, Kaplan looks to the bloody Second Punic War between Rome and Carthage and to the prowess of Emperor Tiberius. Though he admits that Tiberius was something of an absolutist, Kaplan ultimately praises the emperor for combining “diplomacy with the threat of force to preserve a peace that was favorable to Rome.”⁷

What Boot, Mallaby, and Kaplan all have in common—besides being journalists by profession—is a belief in security through empire; that is, they consider expansion to be in the U.S. national interest. Their main line of reasoning appears to be as follows: “If your neighbors don’t seem able to get their political act together, then it may be in your best interest to colonize them.”⁸ Today’s advocates of empire, however, are not so crass as to endorse the “bad” imperialism of the past—which was characterized by conquest and exploitation. Rather, they advocate “good” imperialism—which is aimed at making the world a better place. As Boot puts it: “We don’t want to enslave other countries and loot their resources. We want to liberate oppressed peoples and extend to them the benefits of liberal institutions.”⁹ Although the word “empire” is never used, the Bush administration’s expansive new National Security Strategy seems to adopt such neoimperialist notions. The document ambitiously promises that “we will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets and free trade to every corner of the world” and to take global leadership in that mission.¹⁰ The combination of profligate spending to dissuade other powers from challenging U.S. military supremacy, preventive military attacks on emerging threats before they are formed, the expanding overseas presence of U.S. armed forces, and increased foreign aid and overseas nation-building activities is reminiscent of empires past.¹¹

Talk of an “enlightened” imperialism, however, is not new.¹² This paper provides analysis of and lessons from history that show that the costs of imperial overstretch can erode the economic basis of a superpow-

er's status. It also shows that imperial behavior by one power can lead to counterbalancing by other powers. Imperial expansion can even cause proliferation of weapons of mass destruction among poor countries as the great equalizers vis-à-vis the imperial power. Finally, the military interventions required to maintain an empire can erode the foundations of the constitutional system of a republic such as the United States.

It Takes an Empire

In his 1919 book, *The State in Peace and War*, political theorist John Watson attempted to provide the moral justification for an “enlightened” imperialism. In a nutshell, Watson argued that outsiders have a “legitimate authority” to run the affairs of troubled countries if they are “consciously acting on the basis of a higher good,” namely that of advancing civilization and development.¹³ “Political rule over others,” he wrote, is “justified if the rulers exercise their authority for a good that transcends their own desires” for power and material gain, the hallmarks of traditional imperial rule.¹⁴

Like today's advocates of “enlightened” imperialism, Watson believed there is “good” imperialism and “bad” imperialism. He saw his idea of “good” imperialism approximated in the British Empire, which he recognized was born of bloodshed and exploitation, but he thought it had a positive historical impact because it implanted democratic institutions in diverse places. Watson, in other words, considered empire not an inherently morally offensive idea but a potential force for good.

Framing the idea of empire as a force for good, however, is one of the recurring themes of empires throughout history. Indeed the Roman and British empires were formed, not by force alone, but on the basis of their capacity to present their authority at home and abroad as being in the service of right and peace. That is how empires have regularly justified their authority to use instruments of coercion extraterritorially; that is, they have

felt they were exercising “imperial sovereignty” rather than just “national sovereignty.” The Romans, for example, viewed their imperialism not only as a way to gain honor and riches but also as a unifying force that would spread Roman ideals and produce a widening sphere of order beneficial to those fortunate enough to live within that sphere.

In the mid-19th century, philosopher John Stuart Mill defended the British Empire on the grounds that it was not only in England's strategic and economic interest to impose order on the periphery, but also that empire brought the benefits of higher civilization to misgoverned or ungoverned peoples. It also, claimed Mill, increased England's power and prestige, which was “a great advantage to mankind.”¹⁵ British officials and intellectuals would later characterize British imperialism as the beneficial nexus of self-interest and altruism. Cecil Rhodes, for example, would write, “The more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race,” and Oxford professor Spencer Wilkinson opined that Britain's history not only benefited the British people, but also was a “service rendered to Europe and to mankind” and “carried with it the possibility of that larger service to which we give the name Empire.”¹⁶

Today's advocates of empire similarly talk in terms of both an imperial imperative—colonizing the world's zones of disorder will be good for us—and imperial virtue—colonizing the world's zones of disorder will be good for the natives. Kaplan, for example, says that “the wise employment of force [is] the surest guide to progress” and that imperialism is a “dependable form of protection for ethnic minorities and others under violent assault.”¹⁷ Boot agrees and justifies imperialism as a way to liberate people from chaos or tyrannical rule and to bring to them the blessings of a better way of life. He stresses how American empire can “feed the hungry, tend the sick, and impose the rule of law” in troubled places.¹⁸ Similarly, according to the Bush administration's National Security Strategy, there is a “single model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.”¹⁹

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In Walter Russell Mead's taxonomy of U.S. foreign policy, advocates of bringing civilization to troubled lands through enlightened imperialism—both conservatives and liberals—are called Wilsonians, after the idealistic Woodrow Wilson.²⁰

We're All Wilsonians Now

After World War I, President Wilson advanced the idea of creating a mandatory system of protectorates, whereby the colonial possessions of the defeated Ottoman and German empires would be put under Western "trusteeship" in order "to build up . . . a political unit that can take charge of its own affairs" eventually.²¹ Under Wilson's plan, "imperial sovereignty" would have been exercised, not by a single nation, but by many.

Wilson's project ultimately failed, but the idea behind it has been undergoing a resurrection ever since the Cold War ended.²² Most recently, Robert Cooper, a senior foreign policy adviser to British prime minister Tony Blair, has tried to update Wilson by developing the idea of "cooperative empire."²³ Cooper argues that the existence of zones of disorder—such as Afghanistan, Burma, Colombia, Somalia, and Zimbabwe—is too dangerous for established states to tolerate anymore. "What is needed," says Cooper, "is a new kind of imperialism, one compatible with human rights and cosmopolitan values: an imperialism which aims to bring order and organization."²⁴ Cooper suggests that Western states, perhaps acting under the mandate of the United Nations or some other international body, could take political responsibility for zones of disorder and provide good government and institutional order until the locals can do it themselves. The parallels with Wilson are unmistakable: Wilson justified the invasion of other countries by claiming that it would teach them "to elect good men" or that they were deemed excessively disorderly and posed "a public nuisance at our doorstep," the official explanation for his 1915 occupation of Haiti.²⁵

The debate among today's advocates of empire is mostly about the degree to which the United States should cooperate with other countries in its imperial efforts. Boot, for example, recommends "a formal system of United Nations mandates" modeled on Wilson's "trusteeship" program.²⁶ Mallaby, however, says that the best way to grapple with weak and failed states is to create a "new international body" with a governing structure that is not subject to the United Nations, with its Chinese and Russian vetoes. That new body, he says, "would assemble nation-building muscle and expertise and could be deployed wherever its American-led board decided." Its creation, he adds, would be independent of the UN but serve the same purpose that Wilson's "system of mandates did after World War I."²⁷

Kaplan is more blunt in his assessment of U.S. predominance and emphasizes "delegation" rather than "cooperation." For him, the United States is a force unto itself: "Our prize for winning the Cold War is not merely the opportunity to expand NATO, or to hold democratic elections in places that never had them, but something far broader: *We and nobody else will write the terms for international society.*"²⁸ The extent to which the UN or any other international institutions matter depends on how much the United States makes them matter; because "the UN is effective to the degree that it has the tacit approval of a great power."²⁹ Any "imperial sovereignty" over the world's zones of disorder may therefore fall to the UN or some other international body in practice, says Kaplan, but it will be the United States that gives that sovereignty its meaning.

The Strategy of Empire

The new imperialists have been emboldened to use the attacks of September 11 to justify an American empire to tame failed states that they believe could become havens for terrorists. They, however, are not interested merely in pacifying dangerous corners of

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the planet where America's enemies can hide and conspire, and where tyrants, mass murderers, and other predators can deny their people a decent life. Many are interested in implementing the theory of hegemonic stability, which holds that a massive imbalance of power makes for the most stable international system because no one will be willing or able to challenge the dominant power.³⁰ The object of U.S. foreign policy, they argue, should be not mere national defense but international supremacy.

In its new National Security Strategy, the Bush administration acknowledges an attempt to discourage other powers from challenging U.S. supremacy: "Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing or equaling the power of the United States."³¹

The Bush administration's views on the desirability of dissuading potential opponents from challenging U.S. dominance probably emanate from a document written in 2000 with input from several individuals who are now high-level administration officials. In "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century," which builds on a controversial draft 1992 Department of Defense defense policy guidelines document that some of the same individuals helped write as members of the first Bush administration, speaks of precluding the rise of a rival to U.S. preeminence by spending robustly on the globally present U.S. military in order to mold the international system to comport with U.S. ideals and interests.³²

Enter the strategy of empire. The strategy of empire seeks to make security-motivated power striving unnecessary for allies and unwise for enemies.³³ The strategy presumes that small powers will "bandwagon" with the empire, and big powers will be too overawed to challenge it. The flip side of the presumption is that when an empire's power diminishes, small powers will defect and big powers will become more assertive. A decline in relative power, it is therefore argued, will create a

more disorderly and less peaceful world. The decay of the British Empire at the end of the 19th century is often cited as an example of that process. The pertinent reading of history goes something like this: As British hegemony declined, smaller states that previously had incentives to cooperate with Britain changed their allegiances, and big powers became bolder. The result was World War I and its aftermath.³⁴

Of course, the mechanics of implementing empire today are far different than they have been in the past: vulgar territorial conquest has been replaced by security guarantees, treaty obligations, forward deployments, small wars, and open-ended peacekeeping and nation-building operations. Yet the underlying logic of empire remains the same. Empires operate, not in terms of conducting relations *with* states, but in terms of prevailing over the relations *among* states; that is, empires try to abolish the structural anarchy of the international system by assimilating states into an overarching order.

Given America's disproportionate military and economic superiority, there is now a temptation to try to revise the world and "universalize both peace and the institutions of freedom" by extending an American imperium across the planet.³⁵ Kaplan, for example, says, "The subsuming of the Warring States under the Confucian value system of the Han emperors was a good thing: its global equivalent can now only be achieved by the United States."³⁶ Mallaby says: "A new imperial moment has arrived, and by virtue of its power America is bound to play the leading role. The question is not whether the United States will seek to fill the void created by the demise of European empires but whether it will acknowledge that this is what it is doing."³⁷ To which Boot would add, "America should not be afraid to fight 'the savage wars of peace' if necessary to enlarge the 'empire of liberty.'"³⁸

Fear, however, has nothing to do with why the strategy of empire is fatally flawed. The realities of international politics are what do it in.

Today's advocates of empire talk in terms of both an imperial imperative and imperial virtue.

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Realism's Premature Obituary

Since the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, several observers have concluded that the system of international politics has been fundamentally transformed and that the realist school's³⁹ concepts of structural anarchy, self-help, and security competition are no longer applicable.⁴⁰ But the system of international politics has *not* really been transformed. America's emergence as the only superpower is a change *in* the system, not a change *of* the system.⁴¹ The strategy of empire is therefore likely to encounter many of the same limitations that empires have encountered in the past, which means the risks and costs of enforcing hegemony will eventually rise to unsustainable levels. In other words, the strategy of empire is habitually self-defeating. There are three factors that explain why that is so: (1) new great powers invariably rise, (2) those great powers logically counterbalance against the dominant power, and (3) the dominant power exhausts itself with ever-escalating attempts to maintain its primacy.

Why New Powers Rise

In the early 1990s, a triumphant American commentator argued that the Bush administration's war against Iraq "marks the dawning of the *Pax Americana*" and that U.S. grand strategy should strive to lock in America's post-Cold War hegemony "to secure the 'new world order' that has been the goal of American policy since President Woodrow Wilson."⁴² With U.S. "world leadership," assured another commentator, "today's military midgets will be content to stay that way."⁴³

Like those of today's advocates of empire, such views presume that American hegemony can be made to last because the benevolence of U.S. power will stave off the emergence of new great power rivals. "We're good guys," Boot reminds us.⁴⁴ True enough, but an empire's intent has little to do with why

new great powers rise. What leads to the emergence of new great powers is imitation, the diffusion of power, and a proliferation of interests among states with advancing status.

Political scientist Kenneth Waltz gives the analysis a starting point. In his now-classic *Theory of International Politics*, he observes that competition in the international system "produces a tendency toward sameness of the competitors"; that is, they regularly imitate each other's successful attributes or risk falling behind.⁴⁵ States will adopt the behaviors that made the hegemonic power successful, thus making themselves more successful in the process.

Against that backdrop, the strategy of empire allows other states to free ride militarily and economically, thus enhancing their ability to catch up with the hegemon. It does so from two directions: it speeds up the economic growth of other countries by reducing what they would otherwise have to spend on their own defense and slows the hegemon's economic growth by putting an enormous tax burden on its economy. As political scientist Christopher Layne correctly points out:

A hegemon tends to overpay for security, which eventually weakens the internal foundation of its external position. Other states underpay for security, which allows them to shift additional resources into economically productive investments. Moreover, benign hegemony facilitates the diffusion of wealth and technology to potential rivals. As a consequence, differential growth rates trigger shifts in relative economic power that ultimately result in the emergence of new great powers.⁴⁶

The strategy of empire, in other words, is a subsidy that allows other states to acquire the economic and technological wherewithal to eventually defend themselves and pursue their own ambitions if they so choose. This kind of advancement by other states means, not that the hegemon has become weaker in

an absolute sense, but that other states have become relatively stronger and have thus developed the foundations to compete in international politics.

At the same time, rising states will develop growing economic and political interests in their external environment, and with their advancing status, they will be in a position to do something about it. Indeed, the central effect of the diffusion of power is that it alters states' ability to influence and make more favorable the world around them.⁴⁷

The United States was a free rider on the British Empire from the birth of the American republic until it became a world power around the turn of the 20th century. Although tensions with the British flared from time to time, the United States used the shield of Great Britain to keep military expenditures low and build the world's largest economy. For most of its history, the United States reaped many economic advantages of staying out of wars against the big European powers and limiting or delaying its involvement in the conflicts that it did enter (for example, the Napoleonic wars and World Wars I and II). When the British Empire began to erode by overextension and involvement in World Wars I and II, the United States began "leading" and Great Britain became a "follower." Currently, the United States spends nearly \$400 billion a year for national defense, as much as the combined total defense budgets of the next 15 nations with the highest expenditures for security. The United States could easily go the way of Great Britain by depleting its economy with military overextension.

Today, of course, it should be pointed out that the economic gap between the United States and its economic rivals has actually grown over the past decade, with the American economy growing an average of 5.8 percent a year.⁴⁸ But there is no guarantee this growth will continue. First of all, the potential economic disruption caused by a protracted war on the periphery cannot be assumed away. Take the Vietnam War, which cost 9.3 percent of the gross domestic prod-

uct in the peak year of 1968. The Department of Defense estimates the total direct costs of that war at \$173 billion. To that figure must be added veterans' benefits costs of \$220 billion and interest of \$31 billion. Billions more were spent on taxpayer-funded educational programs for returning vets. Those combined expenditures took a heavy toll on the U.S. economy and contributed to inflation, unemployment, deficit spending, and ultimately recession. President Lyndon Johnson introduced a 10 percent income tax surcharge to help pay for the increasingly expensive war and to hold down inflation. The war's massive costs also drained America's gold reserves and sparked an international monetary crisis involving a threat to U.S. gold reserves in 1967-68.⁴⁹

Second, 10 years is too short a time horizon to make proclamations about the long-term economic sustainability of plans to revise the world under a Pax Americana. Fortunes can turn. During the 1980s, for example, the Japanese economy seemed to be growing at a miraculous rate. But during the 1990s the miracle ended. Japan now lags far behind the United States.

Can fortunes unexpectedly turn for the United States? Recent trends suggest that the U.S. economy, like every other economy, is not immune from trouble. What's more, America's ability to maintain its economic position—and thus fund empire—depends on where the economies of the 21st century make their home. The case is not closed that the United States will be that home. According to a recent *New York Times* report:

A Japanese laboratory has built the world's fastest computer, a machine so powerful that it matches the raw processing power of the 20 fastest American computers combined and far outstrips the previous leader, an I.B.M. built machine. The achievement . . . is evidence that a technology race that most American engineers thought they were winning handily is far from over.⁵⁰

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Counterbalancing Behavior

Realist theory posits that “in international politics, overwhelming power repels and leads other states to balance against it.”⁵¹ There are two main reasons for this behavior: states can never be certain about the future, and states can count only on themselves to always pursue their own interests. Thus, as new powers develop, they will logically take steps to balance against a lopsided power distribution as a hedge to protect their own security and independence.

Advocates of empire, however, are quick to reply that a benevolent hegemon will *not* elicit the same reaction as empires past did and will thus forestall the emergence of counterbalancing powers. As stated earlier, the logic behind their argument is that states will willingly “bandwagon” with the empire because of the benefits of free riding. Thus Boot argues that other states may kvetch about overwhelming American dominance, “but they too benefit from U.S.-underwritten security and I think, deep down in their cynical hearts, they realize it. Otherwise they would spend more of their budgets on defense.”⁵²

But that logic presumes that states will be *lastingly* indifferent to the fluid nature of politics and inherent uncertainty about the future. As political scientist Joseph Grieco notes, however, because states worry that today’s ally can become tomorrow’s rival, “they pay close attention to how cooperation might affect relative *capabilities* in the future.”⁵³ In other words, states react, not to other states’ intentions, but to their capacity to do harm *should things change*. That kind of thinking would help explain why the United States, which was not directly threatened by the world-spanning British Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries nevertheless eventually built up its own capabilities.

Columbia University political scientist Robert Jervis cuts to the heart of the uncertainty issue: “Minds can be changed, new leaders can come to power, values can shift, new opportunities and dangers can arise.”⁵⁴ Unless states are willing to put their fate in the hands of others, they must be prepared to

help themselves in the eventuality that things turn sour. Indeed, no state can guarantee that a hegemon will not someday become intrusive and domineering, in which case other states would no longer be safe and secure. Prudence therefore dictates that states prepare for that eventuality, which means striving to have as much power as possible in case a friendly neighbor turns into the neighborhood bully; in other words, even though you trust the person holding the matches, you should keep a fire extinguisher handy.

This philosophy does not mean, however, that balancing behavior is necessarily an abrupt phenomenon. Recall, for example, that after the Dual Alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1879, it took France and Russia until 1894—15 years—to make a formal alliance to balance against them.⁵⁵

Moreover, the fact that Europe has not already balanced against the United States is not necessarily an exception to the rule, as some writers have claimed.⁵⁶ The transatlantic relationship has been weakening. There have been mounting expressions of resentment of U.S. power and American influence over the Continent’s affairs, as well as friction over issues ranging from global warming to Mideast policy.⁵⁷ Trade disagreements over exports as varied as bananas and steel have become more commonplace, as have disagreements about tax laws and Internet regulations.⁵⁸ Acrimonious economic quarrels between the European Union and the United States have occurred, such as the one in which the EU blocked the merger of American corporate giants General Electric and Honeywell on antitrust grounds in 2001.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Europeans have demonstrated an increasing interest in developing their own security and defense structures and have announced plans to create a sizable emergency force on their own. They have also already resorted to non-traditional means of balancing, such as promulgating treaties and international institutions—such as the Land Mine Ban Treaty and the International Criminal Court—in an

attempt to try to constrain U.S. military behavior on the global stage.

The reason the transatlantic relationship still functions as well as it does today is probably not because of an unselfish desire by Europeans to follow the United States but because of residual balancing against what is still the greater uncertainty on the Continent: the long-term future of Russia. As Columbia University political scientist Richard Betts has pointed out:

Major discontinuities in international relations are seldom predicted. Who would not have been derided and dismissed in 1988 for predicting that within a mere three years Eastern Europe would be liberated, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union deposed, and the Union itself on the ash heap of history? Yet it is hard to believe that the probability of equally revolutionary negative developments, of economic crisis and ideological disillusionment with democracy, of scapegoating and instability leading to miscalculation, escalation, and war several years from now is lower than the probability of the current peace seemed several years ago.⁶⁰

Strategic Overextension

Because the strategy of empire equates national security with maintaining what some people have called “the functional equivalent of global containment,” the emergence of balance-prone powers threatens a hegemon implicitly.⁶¹ As such, a hegemon must take escalating steps to both ward off potential challenges and persuade security dependents that they are still protected. The chief danger here is strategic overextension because the maintenance of what is in essence a military protectorship is open-ended and requires an empire to continually enlarge the geographic scope of its security responsibilities. Indeed, stabilizing one

region logically necessitates the stabilization of the neighbouring region to safeguard the first. For example, much of the impetus for the U.S.-led war in Kosovo was to protect investment in the fragile peace that the West imposed in Bosnia. The process of strategic overextension becomes self-reinforcing because, each time a hegemon expands its perimeter, new potential threats are encountered that demand further expansion. As political scientist Robert H. Johnson explains, political “uncertainty leads to self-extension, which leads in turn to new uncertainty and self-extension.”⁶² Maintaining empire, in other words, requires perpetually widening commitments. Afghanistan is already an obvious example of this process of self-extension. The fate of Hamid Karzai’s government in Kabul, it is argued, now requires Washington to stabilize Central Asia, disentangle the Kashmir conflict, and resolve conflicts in the Middle East.⁶³

What is most alarming about this idea is that it leads to a virtually limitless foreign policy and a potentially exhausting proliferation of American security concerns.⁶⁴ The reason is that the consolidating logic of empire ultimately gives way to a *universalistic* conclusion. During the Vietnam War, Secretary of State Dean Rusk anticipated this view when he said that the United States “is safe only to the extent that its total environment is safe.”⁶⁵ More than 100 years ago, British diplomat Lord Archibald Primrose of Rosebery recognized the basic unsoundness of such thinking:

Scarcely any question can arise in any part of the world without involving British interests. This consideration, instead of widening, rather circumscribes the field of our actions. For did we not strictly limit the principle of intervention we should always be simultaneously engaged in some forty wars.⁶⁶

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that the United States will soon be drawn

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simultaneously into “some forty wars,” but the logic of empire points in the direction of ever-increasing commitments and security burdens. Nineteenth-century British policy-makers, for example, believed India was vital to their interests. The British government, therefore, felt it necessary to safeguard land and sea routes to India, which necessitated propping up the Ottoman Empire; stabilizing the Mediterranean, Egypt, and South Africa; and assuming responsibility for the Persian Gulf. The result, says British military historian Correlli Barnett, “was a classic example of strategic overextension. Far from being a source of strength to England, India served only to weaken and distract her.”⁶⁷

Even more fundamental, today’s advocates of empire dodge the central foreign policy question facing U.S. policymakers in the post-September 11 world: What should America’s priorities be? Because everything is a priority under the strategy of empire, there are no conceptual brakes to prevent the United States from engaging in a sweeping activism that saps both its resources and credibility. Thus Kaplan may invoke Sun-Tzu’s maxim that “the side that knows when to fight and when not to fight will take the victory. There are roadways not to be traveled, armies not to be attacked, walled cities not to be assaulted.”⁶⁸ But Kaplan says next to nothing about what roadways should not be traveled, what armies should not be attacked, and what cities should not be assaulted—if any—under his vision.

The United States, of course, cannot be everywhere at once, so if it adopted the strategy of empire it would have to rely on a posture of extended deterrence, which would promise to defend allies from threats emanating from hostile powers, the periphery, and each other. Because the credibility of extended deterrence depends on having not only the apparent resolve but also the capacity to protect, Washington would have to shore up its regional commitments whenever the capabilities of potential challengers improved. The impending vulnerability of America’s forward-deployed forces in East

Asia illustrates how this posture would likely get more difficult over time, not less.⁶⁹

When East Asia’s military power was measured in Chinese infantry divisions of peasants, their limited reach allowed America to maintain a presence in the region without being threatened in return. For five decades the United States militarily dominated East Asia by operating from forward bases that were secure and from warships that were virtually immune from attack. With the increased reach of Chinese missiles, this era is rapidly coming to a close.⁷⁰

Of course, one way to try to enhance American credibility would be to deploy increasingly large numbers of U.S. forces on foreign soil and ships in foreign ports. But such forward engagement is practical only when small, dispersed forces can efficiently dominate a vast geographical area. In addition, the trend has been in the opposite direction—the United States has reduced its overseas military presence and foreign bases—making the extended deterrence strategy ring hollow. The U.S. military (particularly the Navy), by choosing to purchase expensive armaments in ever smaller quantities, reduces the number of places the dwindling (but more powerful) U.S. forces can be at once.

The extended deterrence strategy also will not be credible because the United States does not really put the same value on all parts of the world. As a result, a policy of extended deterrence could actually invite challenges from rival states wanting to expose the underlying unreality of the posture. In such a case, Washington would be forced to choose between a humiliating climb-down or a conflict over a strategically irrelevant piece of real estate.

The strategy of empire could prove counterproductive in other ways as well. For starters, Washington’s self-assumed responsibility to keep order could be exploited by all sorts of states wanting to advance their own goals. Taiwan could declare its independence with the expectation that the United States would protect it from China’s reaction; Pakistan could exploit its new strategic importance by successfully challenging India

on Kashmir; rebel groups everywhere could intentionally provoke crackdowns—like the Kosovo Liberation Army did in southern Serbia in 1999—with the presumption that the United States would step in and internationalize their cause; and Arab countries, knowing that the Bush administration needs their support for any invasion of Iraq, are withholding it, unless the United States can show progress in its efforts to mediate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The strategy of empire also encourages other states to pass the buck and duck their responsibilities, as European Union countries did during the early 1990s, leaving it to the United States to intervene in Bosnia.⁷¹ That evasion is not surprising. “Bandwagoning” does not necessarily mean that other countries want the United States to lead them. Rather, as historian Ronald Steel points out:

What they mostly want is not leadership but support. The Europeans would like a pledge that if they yet again engage in war with one another, we will be there to help them out of it. The Japanese would like us to be both their dependent customer and uncomplaining protector. Assorted clients and protectorates, most of them left over from the Cold War, want us to continue to provide them with bribes and guarantees.⁷²

In the empires of old the center exploited the periphery to seize resources, ensure captive markets for its goods, and generate taxes for its imperial adventures; America’s neoempire has none of those advantages and instead incurs very high costs. Those costs include heavy spending on defense, the associated drag on the U.S. economy, and retaliatory terrorism in response to the U.S. overseas military presence and intervention needed to police the empire (a calculation based on data from the U.S. State Department indicates that anti-U.S. attacks account for 63 percent of all international terrorist incidents).⁷³ U.S. friends and allies pass on the costs of their

own security to the United States without giving anything in return—for example, opening their markets to U.S. products and services.

An acute understanding of the burdens that buck passing imposes on an empire may help explain why Russian president Vladimir Putin has not loudly objected to the Bush administration’s plans to expand the war against terrorism, enlarge NATO, and build an anti-ballistic missile shield. Moscow’s silence may be part of a shrewd strategy to restore Russia’s great power status by turning its political attention and resources inward⁷⁴ and exporting weapons and technologies outward,⁷⁵ while gladly allowing the United States to encumber itself pacifying the world’s back alleys, babysitting Eastern Europe, and developing and deploying a missile defense system to cover allied and client countries, which could potentially cost more than the gross domestic product of many countries.

From this perspective, not voicing opposition to an empire’s actions doesn’t mean a state is not trying to balance against it. A state may play along in the short term because it recognizes that empire is an uphill climb that becomes ever steeper for the hegemon but provides weaker states with temporary advantages while they improve their relative position. Indeed, throughout the 19th century the United States meticulously avoided joining the British Empire’s European and imperial fights—fights that ultimately bled the British dry. Americans, meanwhile, were free riders on the Royal Navy, which kept the French out of North America and the major sea-lanes of the world open to free trade. The result: the United States became the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere and eventually surpassed Great Britain in all terms of national power. The strategy of empire, in other words, undermined itself; the British Empire, it must be remembered, was involved in no fewer than 98 different wars and military campaigns between 1800 and 1906.⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, many of today’s advocates of empire make the opposite claim: that the danger the United States faces is not

America’s neo-empire has none of the advantages of old empires and instead incurs very high costs.

U.S. friends and allies pass on the costs of their own security to the United States without giving anything in return.

strategic overextension but “underextension.” Boot, for example, writes of “an equal, if not greater, danger of undercommitment and lack of confidence” around the world.⁷⁷ Although such thinking is consistent with the strategy of empire, it does not counter the core point: a foreign policy that equates national interests with the maintenance of world order is an albatross around the neck that will eventually lead to its pursuer’s undoing. Indeed, according to political analyst Benjamin Schwarz, the United States will find itself

caught in a dilemma that eventually ensnares all hegemons. Stabilizing the international system is a wasting proposition. While other states benefit from the stability the predominant power provides, they have little incentive to pay their “fair share” of the costs of protection since the hegemon will defend the status quo in its own interests, regardless of what these lesser states contribute. . . . Forced to place such importance on “security,” the hegemon directs capital, creativity, and attention from the civilian sector, even as other states, freed from onerous spending for security, add resources to economically productive investments. This leads over time to the erosion of the preponderant power’s relative economic strength. As economic, and hence military, capabilities deteriorate, so does the very comparative advantage over other powers upon which hegemony is founded. The hegemon’s declining advantage spurs the emergence of great power rivals, requiring the hegemon to spend more on defense to maintain its preponderance, which, of course, only further deteriorates its competitive advantage.⁷⁸

The United States accounts for about 40 percent of total worldwide defense spending,

up from 28 percent in the mid-1980s, the height of the Reagan military buildup. That’s two and a half times the combined spending of all its potential rivals.⁷⁹ But, as an indication of its overextension, the United States accounts for only 29 percent of the world’s GDP. Another comparison indicates that U.S. allies are free riding: although the U.S. economy is larger than the next three largest economies on the planet—those of Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom—U.S. defense spending is larger than that of the next 15 highest defense spending nations, most of which are rich U.S. allies.⁸⁰

With the war on terrorism, the Bush administration has already requested an additional \$45.5 billion for 2003, bringing the total to \$396 billion, an increase of 13 percent. In all, the administration plans to spend \$2.1 trillion on the military over the next five years, which will raise annual U.S. defense spending 15 percent above the Cold War average.⁸¹ How much more the strategy of empire will cost is unclear. Also, foreign aid, nation building, and other activities related to the strategy are not free. The Bush administration recently pledged to substantially increase America’s core development assistance by 50 percent.⁸² And American efforts at nation building in tiny Bosnia and Kosovo have cost U.S. taxpayers an estimated \$21 billion so far.⁸³ The more dependents and protectorates Washington takes on, the greater the burden on the U.S. economy will be.

Some advocates of an expansive U.S. foreign policy have argued that actual expenditures on a worldwide U.S. military presence are less than the potential costs to the United States of future wars resulting from the absence of such U.S. global policing. Two academics, Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, debunk this myth by using empirical data from major wars—World War I and the Iran-Iraq War—to demonstrate that neutral countries incur only small costs, or actually profit, from even large conflicts. Because the world economy—especially in an age of globalization of trade and investment—is flexible and resilient, neutral countries can profit from

war by selling to belligerents, by taking over markets that warring nations have previously served, by lending money at high rates of return to the fighting countries, and by buying up assets cheaply that have been liquidated by belligerents to fight the war. In addition, Gholz and Press found that the United States pays much more attempting to ensure global security than it would lose from instability and war (and that even with the generous implicit assumption that all U.S. military interventions promote rather than detract from global stability). In short, Gholz and Press demonstrate that the current U.S. policy of being the world's policeman does not pass the cost/benefit test.⁸⁴ Such empirical data confirm the conclusions of the much-earlier intuitive cost/benefit analysis done by Earl Ravenal, a former distinguished research professor of international affairs at Georgetown University.⁸⁵

But today's advocates of empire are undaunted. Regarding a notorious Persian Gulf state, for instance, Boot says: "The Wilsonian alternative is clear: We will settle for nothing less than the establishment of liberal democracy in Iraq."⁸⁶

Imperial Insecurity

Today's advocates of empire tell us that America is bound to lead. "Leading" is painless when everyone goes along. But as historian E. H. Carr once observed, the utopian assumption that there is a common peace that is synonymous with each individual nation's interests evades the messy fact that there are always "nations desirous of maintaining the status quo and nations desirous of changing it."⁸⁷ Peoples and civilizations also have different histories, cultures, and values.⁸⁸ The existence of empire does not change those facts, which raises the question: if conflicting interests are a permanent fixture in world politics, is the strategy of empire really going to make the United States safer?

The answer is probably no. Over the long run the strategy of empire will likely prove

unsustainable and ultimately self-defeating. Certainly, the United States currently has the world's most powerful military, and it spends much more on its defense than all its rivals combined. But it costs far more for the United States—a relatively secure nation separated from most of the world by two vast oceans—to project its power across the seas than it does for states located on other landmasses to project their power regionally. In other words, proximity matters, which raises what John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago has called the "stopping power of water," the belief that "the presence of oceans on much of the earth's surface makes it impossible for any state to achieve *global* hegemony."⁸⁹

What's more, the strategy of empire necessarily leads to a devaluation of other states' sovereignty. That's because accepting the principle of noninterference is an impediment to a dominant state seeking to make other nations conform to its will. State sovereignty also allows for the formation of multiple loci of power and the prospect of power balancing, which are things an empire cannot accept if it is committed to maintaining supremacy. The echo of Rome is clear. As political scientist Frank Russell once wrote: "Rome . . . never was interested . . . in preserving a balance of power. A balance of power system is essentially a device for keeping the power of different states within limits by a system of checks and balances. Rome certainly was not interested in a balance of power for the very reason she was interested in a monopoly of power."⁹⁰

From this perspective, the strategy of empire is unlikely to function if all sorts of states are allowed to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as a deterrent against the power projection of the United States. The logic of empire therefore dictates that as few states as possible should be allowed to gain a defensive footing with the United States. In practice this idea will bring preventative efforts, including war, to make sure WMD proliferation is stopped at all costs. In its National Security Strategy, the Bush administration notes: "These weapons may . . . allow

The United States pays much more attempting to ensure global security than it would lose from instability and war.

The strategy of empire may provoke counter-productive responses, including the proliferation and possible first use of WMD.

these states to attempt to blackmail the United States and our allies to prevent us from deterring or repelling the aggressive behavior of rogue states. Such states also see these weapons as their best means of overcoming the conventional superiority of the United States.”⁹¹

In his June 2, 2002, speech to West Point’s graduating class, President Bush laid out his vision of a future in which the United States more or less monopolizes global military power through preemption if necessary: “America has, and intends to keep, [its] military strengths beyond challenge,” said Bush, and “we have to be ready for preemptive action” because “if we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long.”⁹² (Although the president used the word “preemptive,” which means taking military action before an imminent attack by an adversary, in many cases the United States might launch a preventive attack to stop an incipient threat before it is even realized, for example, before a nation working on WMD, such as Iraq, obtains them.)

That approach is consistent with the strategy of empire. But supporting preventative or preemptive action could shift the rules of the world order against peace and stability.⁹³ Indeed, if other nations, such as India and Pakistan, adopted preemption as their official policy, the risk of nuclear war could actually rise. “One of the reasons there is not a constant state of war,” says a skeptical Bush administration official, “is that we all expect certain rules. We just have to be careful that if we create exceptions to those rules, the exceptions justify it—lest we establish precedents that others will emulate.”⁹⁴

“There’s no question that great powers like the United States [can] launch preventative wars or preemptive strikes whenever they conclude it’s in their interests,” adds Mearsheimer. But the “\$64,000 question is whether or not it makes sense to stand on the rooftops and announce loudly to the world that this is your doctrine. I think it would be better not to do that. I favor the Teddy Roosevelt approach to foreign policy: Speak

softly and carry a big stick.”⁹⁵ The strategy of empire, however, is to speak loudly (extended deterrence) and cut up and scatter Washington’s inadequate stick all over the place. That’s a blueprint for trouble if there ever was one.

It will also increase the likelihood of war. That’s because the doctrine of prevention or preemption is predicated on the “ideology of the offensive,” which says that striking early is less difficult than striking later. The Bush administration’s National Security Strategy boldly asserts that “our best defense is a good offense.”⁹⁶

Consequently, offense-minded states are apt to be war-prone because they believe the prospects for victory are very favorable to them. What’s more, offense-minded states have a tendency to incite security dilemmas, whereby the efforts of weaker states to increase their relative security undermines, or appears to undermine, the security of the offense-minded state, thus triggering a spiral of security competition that can culminate in confrontation or war.⁹⁷ For example, as China’s economy grows, it may want more ability to control its security environment within East Asia. The expansion of Chinese influence in that region may run afoul of a United States, which has a defense perimeter that is far forward and a military doctrine that is very preventive or preemptive.

The other major problem with the doctrine of prevention or preemption is that in the absence of actual aggression against the United States, how will Washington prove that an attack *might* have happened? Surely some foreign and domestic critics will discount the threat afterward. Inevitable mistakes will lead to recrimination and suspicions about America’s motives. And other states will worry that the doctrine could be used against them.⁹⁸ Hence there is a paradox. The doctrine of prevention or preemptive intervention could actually create a greater incentive for other states to try to acquire WMD secretly as an insurance policy against American military might, which could in turn spur even more U.S. prevention or preemption. (Yet as President Clinton

found out in 1998 during Operation Desert Fox, preventive attacks on installations associated with those superweapons often founder on a lack of intelligence on the location of such clandestine small mobile, or deeply buried facilities.) The unintended consequence of interventionism, in other words, could be more interventionism.

Failed states are already an example of those self-reinforcing phenomena. Failed states matter to today's advocates of empire because the existence of such states raises the specter that interventionist foreign policies in one place can have a deadly price tag made possible by individuals willing to take advantage of the situation in another place. Accordingly, the security threat posed by failed states is really a second-order issue; that is, the danger posed by failed states is a consequence of something other than state failure per se. The primary danger is from an interventionist foreign policy that makes enemies who are resourceful and willing move into and exploit failed states. The very problem of failed states, in other words, shows, not that interventionism necessarily solves problems, but that interventionism can create altogether new ones.

Nevertheless, today's advocates of empire are unable to break out of their consolidating logic. Thus, the fact that so many people in the Muslim world dislike America's meddling is not seen as an argument for rethinking U.S. policy or assuming a lower profile. Instead, those advocates see it as an argument for deeper involvement; that is, for ramping up U.S. economic aid, promulgating foreign educational and health care programs, telling other states and aspiring states who their leaders should be, and launching wars to transform countries like Iraq "into a beacon of hope."⁹⁹ Yet it was such nation building that led to the attack on U.S. forces in Somalia.

Thus, like the proverbial man who finds himself stuck in a hole, today's advocates of empire recommend more digging. But digging will neither get the man out of the hole nor make the United States safer. America and its citizens will become an even greater light-

ning rod for the world's political malcontents. As former Reagan adviser and Cato Institute senior fellow Doug Bandow warns: "With the growing ability of small political movements and countries to kill U.S. citizens and to threaten mass destruction, the risks of foreign entanglements increase. . . . In coming years, the United States could conceivably lose one or more large cities to demented or irrational retaliation for American intervention."¹⁰⁰

The strategy of empire could make the United States less secure in another major way as well—by dispersing and overtasking its military personnel and equipment. In fact, a recent top-secret Pentagon war game, code named Prominent Hammer, has revealed that, even now, expanding the campaign against terrorism to a country like Iraq would place severe strains on personnel and cause deep shortages of certain critical weapons. According to the *New York Times*, "The war game measured how the strains of new commitments to domestic defense, the demands of long-term deployments in places like the Balkans and South Korea, southwest Asia and the Sinai, and the stress of ongoing operations in Afghanistan, would affect the military's ability to wage and win a new regional war."¹⁰¹ The conclusion was that the American military would be stretched very thin. The Joint Chiefs of Staff subsequently recommended postponing an attack against Iraq.

And over the longer term there is the issue of being ready to fight a major theater war if necessary. Empires get into trouble because they get bogged down fighting protracted small wars in the hinterland, garrisoning myriad outposts, and accumulating manifold security and treaty commitments they are obliged to honor.¹⁰² The strategic implications are potentially enormous. One of the primary reasons Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain appeased Adolf Hitler at Munich in 1938 was that much of Britain's strength was diffused throughout its far-flung empire; that is, London was not in a position to rebuff a rising Nazi Germany early on because Britain was overstretched.¹⁰³ According to British historian P. M. H. Bell:

The primary danger is from an interventionist foreign policy that makes enemies who are resourceful and willing move into and exploit failed states.

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The fundamental problem was the disparity between Britain's commitments and her resources. The commitments were almost literally worldwide. The Dominions, though asserting their independence of the mother country, still relied on her for protection. Australia and New Zealand, Malaya and Singapore, the Middle East and Mediterranean, Western Europe and the British Isles were all under some kind of threat as the 1930s went on.¹⁰⁴

In 1937, Britain's chiefs of staff produced a gloomy assessment of London's security prospects. Their conclusion was that England should not make new enemies. "The policy of 'appeasement' should never be appraised without recalling this sternly realistic recommendation," says Bell. "To reach an accommodation with Italy in the Mediterranean; to avoid confrontation with the Axis powers over the Spanish Civil War; to find the basis of a settlement with Germany; to make only the most cautious response to Japanese aggression in China—all this followed in large part from the need to diminish the number of one's enemies."¹⁰⁵ Empire, in short, *reduced* Britain's options in the face of a horrible danger.

Similarly, the United States may find that its alliances and commitments around the world may sap its strength for dealing with any rising power—perhaps China.

My Empire, 'Tis of Thee

If every corner of the globe is dependent on American power, what happens if things go badly? Georgetown University professor Charles Kupchan predicts, "You will see a significant retrenchment."¹⁰⁶ But today's advocates of empire are hopeful that Americans can be induced to sacrifice for empire if patriotism and duty are co-opted for the imperial cause.

Kaplan, for example, says, "American patriotism—honoring the flag, July Fourth celebrations, and so on—must survive long

enough to provide the military armature for an emerging global civilization that may eventually make such patriotism obsolete." A patriotic American commitment to empire, he argues, will produce a quasi-utopian outcome, that is, "the emergence of some kind of loose world governance" shaped by the United States. "I am concerned," he explains, "with the United States maneuvering in a wily enough fashion to preserve its power for enough decades, so that interlocking global institutions can mature in the meantime, leading to the world governance . . . I support. And world order of some moderate, virtuous kind can only be fostered by the organizing principle of a great power, driven by its own self-interest." Kaplan therefore extols what he calls "power politics in the service of patriotic virtue."¹⁰⁷

Boot describes how 19th-century British soldiers were willing to die in defense of empire, and he says, "If Americans cannot adopt a similarly bloody-minded attitude, then they have no business undertaking imperial policing." Without skipping a beat he characterizes the task of "imperial policing" in the 21st century as an American duty and asks, "Why not use some of the awesome power of the U.S. government to help the downtrodden of the world, just as it is used to help the needy at home?" (Boot's view from the right seems similar to Madeleine Albright's view from the left—that is, that the United States should put its impressive military to work to fight wars for "humanitarian" ends.) He then favorably quotes Theodore Roosevelt: "A nation's first duty is within its own borders, but it is not thereby absolved from facing its duties in the world as a whole."¹⁰⁸

But as political scientist Amos Perlmutter once pointed out in reviewing American history, Americans are unlikely to be mobilized to embrace a missionary struggle.¹⁰⁹ Our history is one of intervening on the cheap. The exceptions were World War II and the Cold War, but those two struggles were characterized by a great power rivalry with "overarching and threatening ideologies looking to engulf and enslave."¹¹⁰ The general American population, in other words, was persuaded to support the

human and monetary costs associated with fighting fascism and communism because of the expansionistic threat posed by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Without such a totalitarian rival, tolerance of cost will be low. Thus, should the United States now behave like a crusader state, as today's advocates of empire propose, it will likely have to be elite driven, and thus disconnected from the American people.

Dubious Historical Readings

A recurring problem for today's advocates of empire is their tendency to draw questionable conclusions from history. Consider Boot's take on India's experience with British colonialism. He calls on America to do more "state building" in unfamiliar and faraway places because "building a national consciousness" is "hardly impossible." After all, he says, "the British turned a collection of princely states into modern India."¹¹¹ Boot is right, just not in the way he imagines. What unified the princely states into modern India was their common cause *against* British rule. Although India was regarded as the jewel of the British Empire, the British record of rule in India was, at best, mixed. In the first part of the 20th century, India's economic growth stagnated. That stagnation led to justifications for the postindependence policies of socialism—instituted in the last half of the century—that proved so counterproductive.

More generally, although he champions state building in far corners of the globe, Boot does admit that "the American track record of imposing democratic regimes is mixed. The most notable successes are Japan, Germany and Italy. The U.S. tended to be less successful in what later became known as the Third World."¹¹²

Mallaby contends that nation building is a winning proposition and suggests that failed nation building is usually a result of a lack of will, by which he means not enough money and military muscle, especially on the

part of the United States.¹¹³ "In the absence of greatly increased commitment from the UN's leading member states," he says, "a wide gap will remain between nation builders' aspiration to create stable democratic states and what the world's institutions can deliver."¹¹⁴ In reality, political will is only part of the equation. As Ronald Steel has pointed out: "The British have been trying to impose their idea of order on Northern Ireland for three centuries. In 1915 the United States invaded Haiti and stayed nineteen years. The United Nations went to Cyprus [more than] thirty years ago to separate feuding Greeks and Turks; its forces are still there."¹¹⁵ Moreover, statistical research suggests that foreign peacekeepers and generous economic aid tend to work in post-civil war environments only in narrow cases when (1) the previous government was a democracy, (2) the underlying peace agreement has provisions for the territorial autonomy of threatened groups, and (3) the conflict was low intensity.¹¹⁶ Given the parameters of most conflicts today, those research findings do not augur well for the advocates of empire.

As an overarching theme, today's advocates of empire repeatedly emphasize that we live in a "unipolar world" with the United States at the center. That claim not only appeals to a sense of American exceptionalism; also it implies that Washington can do as it pleases. But as Harvard's Samuel Huntington points out, true unipolarity would mean the United States could effectively resolve important international issues, "and no combination of other states would have the power to prevent it." That is certainly not the case in the world today. An impoverished and enfeebled Russia or a modernizing China could quickly put an end to a great number of U.S. policies, especially ill-conceived ones undertaken in their backyards. Thus, clarifies Huntington, contemporary international politics is really a hybrid—"a *uni-multipolar* system with one superpower and several major powers."¹¹⁷ Behaving as if that were not the case—that is, behaving as if the world were truly unipolar—is bound to

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The resentment of U.S. neoimperialism could provoke catastrophic terrorism against the United States itself—thereby dramatically reducing U.S. security.

lead to dangerous confrontations because it misapprehends reality and engenders false optimism, an error that has historically been a leading cause of war.¹¹⁸

Today's advocates of empire also tend to characterize potential opponents as paper tigers, and thus downplay the risks associated with the strategy of empire. Those advocates claim that other countries are too irresolute or weak to really resist American power. They label as superficial the "strategic triangle" of Russia, China, and India. The "strategic partnership" of Moscow and Beijing is inflated rhetoric, according to them. And they do not brand the European Union as a serious body. "I'm still waiting for the EU, China, India, Russia, or Japan to get together in some kind of anti-American alliance," scoffs Boot.¹¹⁹

A variant of this argument is that if other countries were really concerned about America's capability to do harm in the future, we would see the gap between U.S. and other nations' defense expenditures closing. Because the gap is not closing and is in fact growing, we can safely conclude that any anxiety about U.S. power is minimal; that is, America is not a threat, so why counter it? But there is an alternative reading: the fact that the gap is not closing shows, not that other countries are unworried about American activism, but that becoming a prospective empire is very expensive.

Balancing behavior, moreover, is more nuanced than Boot and other advocates of empire care to admit.¹²⁰ A full-blown, formal alliance aimed at maximalist objectives like "toppling" or "making a serious run" at an empire is what might be called "offensive balancing," and it tends to be a final step of balancing behavior, not the first. Offensive balancing also makes no military sense in the present case, given America's strategic immunity, protected as it is by two great oceans. As Metternich once wrote to Castlereagh, "The strongest laws governing states are those of geography."¹²¹

In contrast, "defensive balancing" is a hedging activity. It is informal and minimalist, and it is aimed at keeping options open. It also emphasizes defensive capabilities designed to deny

opponents access to the defender's geostrategic neighborhood, rather than hugely expensive—and probably futile—capabilities aimed at the possible invasion of the American mainland. That is the real backdrop today's advocates of empire disregard as they try to sell policymakers on their strategy to revise the world.

Finally, those who argue that America should emulate the 19th-century British Empire ignore the fact that today's world bears little resemblance to the one over which Britain once presided. Two differences should be obvious: First, the world is far more interconnected today, which makes the consequences of sanctionious, arrogant, or clumsy international behavior riskier politically, diplomatically, and economically. Second, the potential costs associated with making enemies today are far greater than they were for empires past. Indeed, the British and Romans were the targets of assassinations, arson, and other forms of anti-imperial backlash, but that activity was typically small-scale and took place far away from the mother country. In contrast, forms of backlash against the U.S. role as globocop today could be large-scale and long-range and may be directed at America's homeland—as shown by the attacks on September 11, which were launched by Osama bin Laden in retaliation for the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia, U.S. support for Israel, U.S.-led economic sanctions against Iraq, and U.S. backing of corrupt regimes in the Middle East. In the future, terrorists retaliating for U.S. actions overseas could use more powerful weapons against the U.S. homeland—for example, nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. Thus, the resentment of U.S. neoimperialism could provoke catastrophic terrorism against the United States itself—thereby dramatically reducing U.S. security.

Conclusion

According to Columbia University political scientist Jack Snyder, strategic overextension often occurs when, domestically, elite constituencies are willing to back other elite constituencies' imperial projects if their own

imperial projects are supported in return. The result is policy “logrolling” that takes on a momentum of its own.¹²²

Today, there is a worrisome consensus emerging among humanitarian hawks on the left and neoconservatives on the right that America’s international role should be to enforce, by military means if necessary, civility throughout the world. Indicative of this trend is a post-September 11 column by Ronald Asmus, a former deputy assistant secretary of state during the Clinton administration, and Robert Kagan, a contributing editor to the neoconservative *Weekly Standard*. Asmus and Kagan reject both the realist balance-of-power views associated with Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft and the deference to “international community” associated with Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright. “Now we need to chart a more ambitious agenda,” they write. “Neither timid multilateralism nor narrow realism is good enough. . . . [We] need to build a new bipartisan internationalist consensus, both to wage the present struggle and to build a safer future. [We] have a duty to ourselves and to the world to use our power to spread democratic principles and deter and defeat the opponents of our civilization.”¹²³

The Bush administration has used similar rhetoric:

Today, the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence. In keeping with our heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press for unilateral advantage. We seek instead to create a balance of power that favors human freedom: conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty. . . . We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.¹²⁴

What is remarkable is that conservative advocates of empire do not appreciate the

pro-government premise of their policy recommendations; that is to say, their expansive view of the role and effectiveness of the state in promulgating government programs overseas clashes with their dim view of large domestic projects. Indeed, as the conservative scholars Kim Holmes and John Hillen remark, “It is somewhat confusing to discover that the government that runs too much of America runs too little of the world.”¹²⁵ *Newsweek*’s Fareed Zakaria refers to the disconnect as the “conservative confusion,” and points out that

the defining element of conservatism is realism—realism about the limits of state power, the nature of human beings and societies, the complexity of international life. Yet many conservatives who believe that the state can do nothing right at home think that it can do nothing wrong abroad. (If things go badly, why, more money, bigger bombs and ground troops will straighten it out.) Many who are scornful of social engineering at home seem sure it will work beyond our borders. They seem convinced that good intentions and a burst of state power can transform the world. How conservative is that?¹²⁶

But pro-empire conservatives are more than confused: they are contradictory. They say that the original intent of the U.S. Constitution should be respected but are the first to insist that notions like a congressional declaration of war are antiquated and have no place in the modern world.¹²⁷ They assail affirmative action programs and quotas at home but are conspicuously silent when U.S.-backed nation builders mandate ethnic- and gender-based set asides in the Balkans and Central Asia.¹²⁸ They say that political speech is what the Founders had foremost in mind when they drafted the First Amendment but are mum when U.S.-backed officials censor newspapers and impose preelection “blackouts” on television stations in Bosnia and Kosovo.¹²⁹ And they praise the virtues of

Conservative advocates of empire do not appreciate the pro-government premise of their policy recommendations.

History shows that wars have been the greatest source of government growth and have had a tendency to erode the very economic freedoms, civil liberties, and institutions of limited government that the Founders established.

American-style democracy but say nothing when the former head of the U.S.-led nation-building mission in Bosnia freely admits: “With powers that would have made a 19th-century viceroy envious, I did not hesitate to use my authority to impose legislation and dismiss [democratically elected] domestic officials.”¹³⁰

Besides, a decision to chart an imperial course is inconsistent with the ideals of America’s founding generation. Recall that the American colonists rebelled *against* empire and its efforts to impose on them taxes to sponsor global wars and imperial policing.¹³¹ History, moreover, shows that wars have been the greatest source of government growth and bureaucratizing, and have had a tendency to erode the very economic freedoms, civil liberties, and institutions of limited government that the Founders established.¹³² Andrew Bacevich, a retired Army colonel and professor of international relations at Boston University, thinks American empire may be inevitable but readily concedes, “I . . . suspect that we’ll end up paying a higher cost, morally and materially, than we currently can imagine.”

“I would prefer a non-imperial America,” Bacevich says. “Shorn of global responsibilities, a global military, and our preposterous expectations of remaking the world in our image, we would, I think, have a much better chance of keeping faith with the intentions and hopes of the Founders.”¹³³ Military historian Richard Kohn notes that most Americans would wisely reject an imperial role if it were put to them openly: “They recognize that it would cost us our soul.”¹³⁴

The strategy of empire also breaks with the founding generation’s sound approach to foreign policy, which was aimed not at national isolation, as is widely misperceived, but at strategic independence. Indeed, Washington and Jefferson’s warnings about “permanent” and “entangling” alliances, respectively, were not a call for retreat.¹³⁵ They were a call for the United States to keep a free hand. The strategy of empire, in contrast, is aimed at tying the U.S. hand down to nearly every corner of the globe. A nation that has too much *political* connection to others, cau-

tioned Washington, “is in some degree a slave.”¹³⁶

What’s most troubling about the strategy of empire, however, is that its effect will probably be the opposite of what its proponents claim, ultimately putting other nations on the defensive and provoking counterproductive responses, including the proliferation and possible first use of WMD.

The real question facing policymakers today is not whether relative U.S. power will eventually wane but whether the strategy of empire will accelerate that process. In the late 1800s at the height of British power, who could have predicted that, 60 years later, imperial overextension and costly involvement in two large wars would lead to the demise of a once great superpower? A century later, the Soviet Union’s overextension and excessive military spending were too much for its creaky socialist economy and led to its collapse. Jack Snyder and other academics who study imperial overextension would cast doubt on the thesis—advocated by proponents of empire—that the United States can adopt the strategy of empire and not ultimately have its power diminished.

Walter Russell Mead, in his history of U.S. foreign policy, says that there has been no debate on the value of U.S. hegemony to the country. Perhaps the advocates of empire—including the Bush administration—are doing policy discourse a favor by being blatant about their ambitions. Mead also asks, “What is the point of our ‘empire’—to make us rich, or to make us safe, or to build a better world?”¹³⁷

That key question is never addressed by the foreign policy establishment, which derives so much prestige and power from the U.S. role as an interventionist superpower. This paper has argued that the United States will not get rich by adopting an imperial policy. Quite the contrary: the massive amount of U.S. taxpayer dollars spent unnecessarily on excessive military power to police the world and to conduct nation-building missions certainly does not pay for itself in any benefits to the United States from increased overseas trade or investment because of fewer

disruptive wars or from increased economic and commercial concessions from protected nations. And as noted earlier, even Max Boot admits that building a better world through nation building is very difficult.¹³⁸

Having an empire does not make us safer. The animosity toward the United States of groups and nations in far-flung places—demonstrated graphically by the attacks of September 11—indicates that imperial overstretch has quite the opposite effect. The first goal of any government should be to ensure the safety and well-being of the people. Adopting a strategy of empire is actually counterproductive to those ends.

Notes

1. Committed advocates of empire existed before September 11, too. See Thomas E. Ricks, "Empire or Not? A Quiet Debate over U.S. Role," *Washington Post*, August 21, 2001, p. A1; and Ernest W. Lefever, *America's Imperial Burden: Is the Past Prologue?* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1999).
2. Max Boot, "The Case for American Empire," *Weekly Standard*, October 15, 2001, p. 27. Emphasis in original. Also see Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.
4. Sebastian Mallaby, "The Reluctant Imperialist: Terrorism, Failed States, and the Case for American Empire," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 2 (March–April 2002): 6.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.
6. Robert D. Kaplan, *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos* (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 153.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
8. Preston Jones, "The World According to Robert Kaplan," *Ottawa Citizen*, March 3, 2002, p. C13.
9. Max Boot, "The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power," dialogue with James Gibney, *Slate*, May 8, 2002, www.slate.com/?id=2065505.
10. White House, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," September 2002, p. v. Cited hereafter as "National Security Strategy."
11. *Ibid.*, pp. v, 2, 6, 21–22, 29, 30, 31.
12. Nor are surveys and critiques of it. See, for example, Lance E. Davis and Robert Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Political Economy of British Imperialism, 1860–1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899–1903* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982); Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898–1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968); Robert Huttenback, *The British Imperial Experience* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1966); E. M. Winslow, *The Pattern of Imperialism* (1948; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (1919; New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1974); John Hobson, *Imperialism, A Study* (1902; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965); and Richard Cobden, *The Works of Richard Cobden*, ed. Peter J. Cain (London: Routledge, 1996).
13. Quoted in Robert Sibley, "The Empire Strikes Back," *Ottawa Citizen*, May 5, 2002, p. A14.
14. Quoted in *ibid.*
15. Quoted in Eileen P. Sullivan, "Liberalism and Imperialism: J. S. Mill's Defense of the British Empire," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 4 (October–December 1983): 612. Also see Kenneth E. Miller, "John Stuart Mill's Theory of International Relations," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22, no. 4 (October–December 1961); John Stuart Mill, "A Few Words on Non-Intervention," in *John Stuart Mill: Essays on Politics and Culture*, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1963), pp. 368–84; and John Stuart Mill, "On Colonies and Colonization, 1848," in *Principles of Political Economy*, ed. J. Laurence Laughlin (New York: D. Appleton, 1891), pp. 540–60.
16. Quoted in E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: St. Martin's, 1939), p. 76.
17. Kaplan, *Warrior Politics*, pp. 147, 154.
18. Boot, "The Case for American Empire," p. 30.
19. "National Security Strategy," p. iv.
20. Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Century Foundation, 2001), pp. 132–73.
21. Quoted in David Rieff, "A New Age of Liberal Imperialism?" *World Policy Journal* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 9.

22. See *ibid.*; Richard Caplan, *A New Trusteeship? The International Administration of War-Torn Territories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2002); Stanley Hoffmann, "What Should American Foreign Policy Be?" *Dissent* (Fall 1994); Peter Lyon, "The Rise and Fall and Possible Revival of International Trusteeship," *Journal of Commonwealth and Commonwealth Politics* 31, no. 4 (March 1993); and Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner, "Saving Failed States," *Foreign Policy* no. 89 (Winter 1992-93): 3-20.
23. Quoted in Sibley.
24. Robert Cooper, "Why We Still Need Empires," *Guardian* (London), April 7, 2002, p. 27.
25. Quoted in Ronald Steel, *Temptations of a Superpower* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 102.
26. Boot, "The Case for American Empire," p. 29.
27. Mallaby, p. 7.
28. Kaplan, *Warrior Politics*, pp. 144-45. Emphasis in original.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
30. One scholar has defined the theory in the following way: "The theory, to state it baldly, claims that the presence of a single, strongly dominant actor in international politics leads to collectively desirable outcomes for *all* states in the international system. Conversely, the absence of a hegemon is associated with disorder in the world system and undesirable outcomes for individual states." Duncan Snidal, "The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory," *International Organization* 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1985): 579. Emphasis in original. For more on the theory, see Isabelle Grunberg, "Exploring the 'Myth' of Hegemonic Stability," *International Organization* 44, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 431-78; Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics*, 2d ed. (New York: Knopf, 1968), chap. 4.
31. "National Security Strategy," p. 30.
32. Thomas Donnelly, "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century," Project for the New American Century, September 2000, pp. i-ii. Paul Wolfowitz, Dov Zakheim, Stephen Cambone, and I. Lewis Libby all contributed to this report and are all now high-level national security officials in the present administration.
33. This view was clearly expressed in the first Bush administration's Defense Planning Guidance Plan, which was leaked to the press in 1992. The plan called for the United States to "establish and protect a new order that holds the promise of convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture to protect their legitimate interests. . . . In non-defense areas, we must account sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order. . . . We will retain the pre-eminent responsibility for addressing selectively those wrongs which threaten not only our interests, but those of our allies and friends, or which could seriously unsettle international relations." Quoted in "Excerpts from Pentagon's Plan: 'Prevent the Emergence of a New Rival,'" *New York Times*, March 8, 1992, p. 14.
34. See Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Oh What a . . . Small War," *National Review*, May 20, 2002, pp. 47-49.
35. Mallaby, p. 6.
36. Kaplan, *Warrior Politics*, p. 145.
37. Mallaby, p. 6.
38. Quoted in Owens, p. 48.
39. The realist school believes that nations act primarily out of their self-interest (as opposed to acting for the ideological reasons) and that the balance of power governs relations among nations. That is, members of this school believe that if one nation's power becomes excessive, other nations will band together to offset it.
40. For example, see Richard Ned Lebow, "The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War and the Failure of Realism," *International Organization* 42, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 249-77; Paul Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neorealist Theory," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 108-48; and Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" *International Security* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 5-55. On the realist school of international relations, see Carr; Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1948); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Raymond Aron, *International Relations: A Theory of Peace and War*; trans. Richard Howard and Annette Baker Fox (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1973); and Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).
41. See John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), chap. 10; Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the

- Cold War," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 5–41; Robert Jervis, "International Primacy: Is the Game Worth the Candle?" *International Security* 17, no. 4 (Spring 1993): 52–67; and John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security* 15, no. 1 (Summer 1990): 5–56.
42. Joshua Muravchik, "At Last, Pax Americana," *New York Times*, January 24, 1991, p. A23.
43. Charles Krauthammer, "What's Wrong with the 'Pentagon Paper'?" *Washington Post*, March 13, 1992, p. A25.
44. Boot, "The Savage Wars of Peace."
45. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 127, quoted in Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security* 17, no. 4 (Spring 1993): 15.
46. Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion," p. 34.
47. See Gilpin, pp. 94–95.
48. Annual growth of the U.S. gross domestic product for 1991–2001 was as follows: 1991, 3.2%; 1992, 5.6%; 1993, 5.1%; 1994, 6.2%; 1995, 4.9%; 1996, 5.6%; 1997 6.5%; 1998, 5.6%; 1999, 5.5%; 2000, 6.5%; and 2001, 3.4%.
49. See John Whiteclay Chambers II, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Military History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/vietnam/domestic.htm (accessed July 3, 2002); and Timothy B. Clarke, "Everybody Wants More for Defense—But Is There Room in the Budget?" *National Journal*, May 17, 1980.
50. John Markoff, "Japanese Computer Is World's Fastest, As U.S. Falls Back," *New York Times*, April 20, 2002, p. A1, cited in Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Eagle Has Crash Landed," *Foreign Policy*, July–August 2002, p. 67.
51. Kenneth N. Waltz, "America as a Model for the World? A Foreign Policy Perspective," in *The Use of Force*, 4th ed., ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz (New York: University Press of America, 1993).
52. Boot, "The Savage Wars of Peace."
53. Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Internationalism," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 500. Emphasis in original.
54. Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 105.
55. See Fred Halliday and Justin Rosenberg, "Realism Revisited: Interview with Ken Waltz," *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 377.
56. See, for example, Josef Joffe, "Who's Afraid of Mr. Big?" *National Interest* 64 (Summer 2001): 43–52.
57. See, for example, Peter Ford, "Europe's View: A Self-Centered U.S.," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 5, 2001, p. 6; Martin Walker, "What Europeans Think of America," *World Policy Journal* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2000); Viola Herms Drath, "The View from Europe: Old Allies Are Ready to Go Their Own Way," *Washington Times*, December 8, 2000, p. A21; "Criticism Swells over U.S. Opposition of World War Crimes Court," Agence France Presse, July 2, 2002; and Andrew Grice, "Visit by British Minister to Arafat Deepens Rift with U.S.," *Independent* (London), July 3, 2002, www.altavista.com/sites/search/web?q=%2BAustralian%2BBroadcast%2BCorporation+%2Bnews&avkw=tgz&kl=XX&stq=10 (accessed July 3, 2002) and Peter Finn, "Germany Balks at Helping U.S. in Moussaoui Trial," *Chicago Tribune*, June 11, 2002, p. 3.
58. See, for example, Daniel Griswold, "The Coming Trans-Atlantic Trade Tussle," *Wall Street Journal Europe*, December 13, 2000; Aaron Lukas, "Yes, We Sell No Bananas," Cato Institute Daily Commentary, November 23, 1998, www.cato.org/dailys/11-23-98.html (accessed July 3, 2002); Veronique de Rugy, "Repel the Cartel," *National Review Online*, June 7, 2002, www.nationalreview.com/nrof_comment/comment-derugy060702.asp (accessed July 3, 2002); and Aaron Lukas, "Safe Harbor or Stormy Waters? Living with the EU Data Protection Directive," Cato Institute Trade Policy Analysis no. 16, October 30, 2001.
59. See William Pfaff, "New Challenges to U.S. Corporate Abuse," *International Herald Tribune*, June 8, 2002, p. 6; Jean Eaglesham and Francisco Guerrers, "Brussels Tougher Than U.S. on Merger Control," *Financial Times*, January 9, 2002, p. 9; and Martin Sikora, "Why All Buyers Should Care about the GE/Honeywell Misfire," *Mergers and Acquisitions Journal*, September 1, 2001.
60. Quoted in Jervis, "International Primacy," p. 56.
61. David C. Hendrikson and Robert W. Tucker, *The Imperial Temptation: The New World Order and America's Purpose* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1992), p. 203.
62. Robert H. Johnson, *Improbable Dangers: U.S. Conceptions of Threat in the Cold War and After* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), p. 206. Cited in Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing," p. 101.

63. See, for example, Robert E. Hunter, "Sitting on the Sidelines Isn't Good Enough," *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 2002, p. 11; Robert M. Hathaway and Dennis Kux, "With India and Pakistan, Step Up Preventive Diplomacy," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 31, 2001, p. 21; and H. D. S. Greenway, "Focus Must Be on Central Asia's Stability," *Boston Globe*, October 15, 2001, p. A15.
64. This point is made by Kim R. Holmes and John Hillen in their response to William Kristol and Robert Kagan's call for an American "benevolent global hegemony." Kim R. Holmes and John Hillen, "Misreading Reagan's Legacy: A Truly Conservative Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 5 (September-October 1996): 162-67.
65. Quoted in Christopher Layne and Benjamin Schwarz, "American Hegemon—Without an Enemy," *Foreign Policy* no. 92 (Fall 1993): 15.
66. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
67. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 14.
68. Quoted in Kaplan, *Warrior Politics*, p. 126.
69. See Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing," *International Security* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 98.
70. Paul Bracken, "America's Maginot Line," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1998, www.theatlantic.com/issues/98dec/maginot.htm.
71. See Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home, America: The Strategy of Restraint in the Face of Temptation," *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 16.
72. Steel, p. 109.
73. See U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2001*, Appendix I, www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgrpt/2001/html.
74. Recall that Putin's latest state of Russia speech was almost exclusively about domestic issues and internal reforms. Limiting public criticism of Washington in the wake of September 11 has also given Russia a free pass from U.S. criticism on Chechnya, which is important to Moscow because further national disintegration could follow if the Chechen rebels are allowed to succeed.
75. See, for example, John Pomfret, "China to Buy 8 More Russian Submarines; \$1.6 Billion Deal Would Aid a Blockade of Taiwan, Challenge U.S. Power in Region," *Washington Post*, June 25, 2002, p. A15; Mark Matthews, "U.S. Ties to Russia May Fray over Iran: Bush Expected to Urge Putin to Stop Exports of Weapons Technology," *Baltimore Sun*, May 23, 2002, p. 1A; Marat Kenzhetayev and Lyuba Pronina, "Rocketing Up the Arms Sales Charts," *Moscow Times*, April 15, 2002; and "Russia to Speed Up Delivery of Military Hardware," *Times of India*, February 9, 2002.
76. Those wars were, in chronological order: Indian Wars (1800-1802), Denmark (1801), Egypt Campaign (1801), Kandian War (1803), West Indies Campaigns (1803-1805), 2nd Mahratta War (1803-1806), Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), Cape of Good Hope (1806), South American War (1806-1807), Italy and Mediterranean (1806-1812), Chumar (1807), Denmark (1807), Egypt (1807) Peninsular War (1808-1814), Arabia (1809), Travancore (1809), Walcheren (1809), West Indies Campaign (1809-1815), French Indian Ocean (1810), Dutch East Indies (1810-1811), 4th Kaffir War (1811-1812), War of 1812 (1812-1815), Germany (1813), Netherlands Campaigns (1813-1814), Nepal Campaign (1814-1816), Ceylon Campaign (1814-1818), 3rd Mahratta War (1817-1819), 5th Kaffir War (1819), Arabia (1819-1821), Ashanti Campaign (1824), Assam (1824-1825), 1st Burma War (1824-1826), Portuguese Expedition (1827-1828), Jat War (1825-1826), Coorg Campaign (1834), 6th Kaffir War (1834-1835), 1st Carlist War (1836-1838), Canadian Rebellion (1837-1838), Aroostook War (1839), Capture of Aden (1839), 1st Afghan War (1839-1842), 1st China War (1839-1842), Syrian Expedition (1840-1841), Occupation of Durban (1842), Conquest of Scinde (1843), Gwalior Campaign (1843), Argentina-Uruguay War (1843-1852), 1st Maori War (1845-1847), Orange Free State Expeditions (1845 and 1848), 7th Kaffir War (1846-1847), 1st Sikh War (1845-1846), 2nd Sikh War (1848-1849), 8th Kaffir War (1850-1853), North West Frontier (1849-1878), 2nd Burma War (1852-1853), Crimean War (1853-1856), Persian War (1856-1857), Indian Mutiny (1857-1858), 2nd China War (1857-1862), 2nd Maori War (1860-1861), Sikkim Expedition (1861), Trent Affair (1861-1862), Japanese Intervention (1863-1864), 3rd Maori War (1863-1866), North East Frontier (1864-1866), South Arabian Expedition (1865-1866), Bhutan Campaign (1865-1866), Fenian Raids (1866), Abyssinian War (1867-1868), Fenian Raids (1870), South Africa (1873), Ashanti War (1873-1874), Perak Campaign (1875-1876), 9th Kaffir War (1877-1879), 2nd Afghan War (1878-1880), Zulu War (1879), Basuto Wars (1880-1881), 1st Anglo-Boer War (1880-1881), Egypt Intervention (1882-1884), North West Canada (1885), 1st Sudan War (1885-1886), 3rd Burma War (1885-1887), West Africa (1887), North East Frontier (1888-1897), North West Frontier (1888-1898), West Africa (1892-1894), Rhodesia (1896), Bechuanaland (1896-1897), 2nd Sudan War (1896-1898), East

Africa (1896–1899), West Africa (1898–1899), 2nd Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), Ashanti War (1900), 3rd China War (1900), Somaliland (1901–1904), Tibet (1904), Conquest of Sokoto (1903), and Zulu Rebellion (1906). See “Chronological Index of the Wars, Campaigns, and Operations of Britain, the Empire, and Commonwealth,” www.regiments.org/milhist/wars/wars.htm (accessed July 6, 2002).

77. Quoted in Owens, p. 48.

78. Benjamin C. Schwarz, “The Arcana of Empire,” *Salmagundi* 101–102 (Winter–Spring 1994): 203.

79. For more information on the magnitude of U.S. defense spending compared with that of other nations, see Ivan Eland, *Putting “Defense” Back into U.S. Defense Policy: Rethinking U.S. Security in the Post–Cold War World* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001), pp. 13–15.

80. Data from Fareed Zakaria, “Our Way: The Trouble with Being the Only Superpower,” *New Yorker*, October 14 and 21, 2002, pp. 74–75.

81. See “Fiscal Year 2003 Budget: Highlights of the FY’03 Budget Request,” Center for Defense Information, February 4, 2002, www.cdi.org/issues/budget/FY03Highlights-pr.cfm (accessed July 3, 2002).

82. “National Security Strategy,” pp. 21–22.

83. See U.S. General Accounting Office, *Balkans Security: Current and Projected Factors Affecting Regional Stability*, April 2000, p. 86.

84. Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, “The Effects of Wars on Neutral Countries: Why It Doesn’t Pay to Preserve the Peace,” *Security Studies* 10, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 2–4.

85. Earl Ravenal, *Designing Defense for a New World Order: The Military Budget in 1992 and Beyond* (Washington: Cato Institute, 1991), pp. 14–16.

86. Max Boot, “George W. Bush: The ‘W’ Stands for Woodrow,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 2002.

87. Carr, p. 53.

88. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

89. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 44 and 84. Emphasis added. Although some may claim that the British Empire refutes this assertion, Mearsheimer points out that the British Empire never seriously threatened to take over or occupy another great power. It instead accumulated

weak or undefended powers, as did other great powers. Understanding the limits of power projection over water, German chancellor Otto von Bismarck once said of the prospect that the British army might invade, “[I’d] call out the local police and have it arrested.” Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 119.

90. Frank M. Russell, *Theories of International Relations* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1936), p. 79.

91. “National Security Strategy,” p. 15.

92. George W. Bush, Remarks at 2002 graduation exercise of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York, June 2, 2002, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html.

93. According to the director of the University of Maryland’s Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy, William Galston: “A global strategy based on the new Bush doctrine means the end of the system of international institutions, laws, and norms that the United States has worked for more than half a century to build. What is at stake is nothing less than a fundamental shift in America’s place in the world. Rather than continuing to serve as first among equals in the postwar international system, the United States would act as a law unto itself, creating new rules of international engagement without agreement by other nations.” William A. Galston, “Why a First Strike Will Surely Backfire,” *Washington Post*, June 16, 2002, p. B1.

94. Quoted in Richard Wolffe, “The Bush Doctrine,” *Financial Times*, June 20, 2002, p. 12.

95. Quoted in Storer H. Rowley, “Critics Say Bush Doctrine Might Provoke 1st Strike,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 24, 2002, www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0206240195jun24.story (accessed June 25, 2002).

96. “National Security Strategy,” p. 6.

97. For more detailed discussions of the consequences of offensive strategies, see Stephen Van Evera, “Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War,” *International Security* 22, no. 4 (Fall 1998); Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under Security Dilemma,” in *The Use of Force*, 3d ed., ed. Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988); Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984); and George Quester, *Offense and Defense in the International System* (New York: Wiley, 1977).

98. For these and other potential consequences, see Richard Falk, “The New Bush Doctrine,” *Nation*, July 15, 2002, pp. 9–11; and Thomas Bray, “Rein in Bush’s Pre-Emptive Attack Idea,” *Detroit*

News, June 19, 2002, www.detnews.com/2002/editorial/0206/19/a13-518235.htm.

99. See Boot, "The Case for American Empire," p. 30; and Mallaby, pp. 3–5. Also see Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Rethinking Sovereignty: American Strategy in the Age of Terrorism," *Survival* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 134; and Ray Takeyh and Nikolas Gvosdev, "Do Terrorist Networks Need a Home?" *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 106.

100. Doug Bandow, "Keep the Troops and the Money at Home" in *America's National Interest in a Post-Cold War World: Issues and Dilemmas*, ed. A. Z. Rubinstein (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), p. 103. For a survey of the backlash effects of hegemonic behavior, see Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Cost and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000). For a list of terrorist incidents in retaliation for an interventionist U.S. foreign policy, see Ivan Eland, "Does U.S. Intervention Overseas Breed Terrorism? The Historical Record," Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing no. 50, December 17, 1998.

101. Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt, "Military Would Be Stressed by a New War, Study Finds," *New York Times*, May 24, 2002, p. A8.

102. Recall, for example, that Afghanistan's president Hamid Karzai already says that his nation will need foreign troops and aid workers indefinitely; "for as long as we need . . . to fight terrorism, to fight warlordism, to fight anarchy . . . until we have our own institutions—a national army, a national intelligence, national police and so on." Quoted in Steven Komarow, "Karzai: Foreign Troops Needed Indefinitely," *USA Today*, June 26, 2002, www.usatoday.com/advertising/orbitz/orbitz-window.htm.

103. See Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); and Miles Kahler, *Decolonization in Britain and France* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984). Cited in Snyder, p. 8.

104. P. M. H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*, 2d ed. (New York: Longman, 1997), pp. 199–200.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

106. Quoted in Brian Mitchell, "'Pax Americana' Reconsidered," *Investor's Business Daily*, January 27, 1999, p. A1.

107. Kaplan, *Warrior Politics*, pp. 144, 146, 154.

108. Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, pp. 347–48, 350.

109. In fact, a recent survey of 634 college stu-

dents done by Lutz Research Cos. found that, although 79 percent of college students believe the United States "has the right to overthrow Hussein," 37 percent said they would be likely to evade a draft if one were necessary to succeed in the overthrow. Amazingly, 58 percent of those who said they would evade the draft also supported an invasion of Iraq. In other words, they favor fighting as long as someone else has to do it. See George McEvoy, "If Bush Needs a Draft to Invade Iraq, Good Luck," *Palm Beach Post*, June 29, 2002, www.gopbi.com/partners/pbpost/epaper/editions/saturday/opinion_d3c1bad4c35ea0a81061.html (accessed July 1, 2002).

110. Amos Perlmutter, *Making the World Safe for Democracy: A Century of Wilsonianism and its Totalitarian Challengers* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 6.

111. Boot, "The Case for American Empire," p. 29.

112. Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, p. 345.

113. Robert I. Rotberg makes the same argument in "Failed States in a World of Terror," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July–August 2002): 127–40.

114. Mallaby, p. 5.

115. Steel, pp. 105–6.

116. Caroline Hartzell, Matthew Hoddie, and Donald Rothchild, "Stabilizing the Peace after Civil War: An Investigation of Some Key Variables," *International Organization* 55, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 183–208.

117. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 2 (March–April 1999): 35–49. Emphasis in original.

118. See Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999).

119. Boot, "The Savage Wars of Peace."

120. See especially Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July–August 2002): 20–33.

121. Quoted in Henry A. Kissinger, *World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812–1822* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1977), pp. 309–10. Abraham Lincoln reflected a similar understanding of the importance of geography, especially in the case of the United States: "Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant to step the Ocean and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe, Asia, and

Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years." Quoted in Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 52.

122. See Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Cornell, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

123. Ronald D. Asmus and Robert Kagan, "Commit for the Long Run," *Washington Post*, January 29, 2002, www.ceip.org/files/publications/2002-01-29-kaganpost.asp (accessed June 21, 2002).

124. "National Security Strategy," p. iv.

125. Holmes and Hillen, p. 162.

126. Fareed Zakaria, "Conservative Confusion on Kosovo," *Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 1999, p. A26.

127. This point is made by Michael Kinsley in "Who Wants This War?" *Slate*, July 10, 2002, www.slate.msn.com/?id=2067896 (accessed July 11, 2002).

128. See, for example, Stefan Racin, "Kouchner Signs Municipal Elections Law," United Press International, July 11, 2000; and Larry Kaplow, "Women to Help Forge Path for Afghanistan," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, June 10, 2002, p. 7A.

129. See, for example, Richard Mertens, "UN Censorship: Kosovo Press Names, Vigilantes Act," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 4, 2000; "Bosnia: IMC Says Five Broadcasters Violated Election Rules," BBC Worldwide Monitoring, April 27, 2000; Garentina Kraja, "Kosovo Board Planned to Oversee Media," *Washington Times*, October 18, 1999, p. A15; "Kosovo's Incipient Media Ministry," editorial, *New York Times*, August 30, 1999, p. A22; "KFOR Shuts Down Albanian Newspaper, Arrests Publisher," *Kosovapress*, August 9, 1999; Aida Cerkez-Robinson, "Bosnian Serb TV Station Banned," Associated Press, April 15, 1999; "Media Monitoring Commission Shuts Down Kanal S

TV," Beta News Service, April 14, 1999; "Analysis: Bosnia's Independent Media Commission Get to Work," BBC Worldwide Monitoring, August 6, 1998; and Philip Shenon, "Allies Creating Press-Control Agency in Bosnia," *New York Times*, April 24, 1998, p. A8.

130. Wolfgang Petritsch, "In Bosnia, An 'Entry Strategy,'" *Washington Post*, July 2, 2002, p. A15. This, of course, belies Kimberly Kagan's claim that America "treats no nations as protectorates" and does not "send governors" or "impose" laws on small states. See Kimberly Kagan, "Hegemony, Not Empire," *Weekly Standard*, May 6, 2002, pp. 16-17.

131. Indeed, Thomas Paine believed "Britain's imperial ambitions were precisely what dragged the colonists in to unwanted wars and spoiled their trade." See McDougall, p. 19.

132. See Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992); Bruce D. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State: The Military Foundations of Modern Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Martin Van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Randolph Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays, 1915-1919*, ed. Carl Resek (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1999); and John V. Denson, ed., *Reassessing the Presidency: The Rise of the Executive State and the Decline of Freedom* (Auburn, Ala.: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2001).

133. Quoted in Ricks, p. A1.

134. Quoted in *ibid*.

135. See President George Washington's Farewell Address, September 17, 1796, www.customcpu.com/personal/pir/documnts.htm (accessed July 5, 2002); and President Thomas Jefferson's First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1801, www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/president/inaug/jefinau1.htm.

136. Washington.

137. Mead, p. 324.

138. Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, pp. 345, 346.

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