

Naked Imperialism  
The U.S. Pursuit of Global Dominance

*John Bellamy Foster*



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## Preface

**G**lobal warfare, putatively against terrorism but more realistically in the service of imperialism, is the dominant political reality of the opening decade of the twenty-first century. Glorification of empire by leading U.S. pundits, politicians, and corporate leaders is as great as at any time in history. The influential writer Robert Kaplan, a correspondent for the *Atlantic Monthly*, proudly proclaims on the opening page of his 2005 book *Imperial Grunts: The American Military on the Ground*: “By the turn of the twenty-first century the United States military had already appropriated the entire earth, and was ready to flood the most obscure areas of it with troops at a moment’s notice.” Kaplan goes on to praise what he calls the “idealistic” content of Rudyard Kipling’s racist poem “The White Man’s Burden,” written to justify U.S. conquest and colonization of the Philippines following the Spanish-American War of 1898. And he lauds the U.S. military map dividing the entire planet into five distinct unified command zones, comparing it to a similar map first introduced by the German geopolitical theorist and Nazi ideologue Karl Haushofer whose views of conquest and *Lebensraum* directly influenced Hitler. “The United States, having vanquished Germany’s budding world empire in World War II,” Kaplan tells us, “now had operational requirements for maintaining its own ... American Empire.”<sup>1</sup>

Such bellicose views could be more easily ignored if the United States were not engaged in a new period of naked imperialism—one that has engendered a period of disorder and trauma afflicting the entire world. Thus far mainstream social science in the United States has had little success in explaining these developments. With few exceptions, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 are

treated as if they literally “fell out of the skies” or else emanated from the head of one man—Osama Bin Laden. No serious treatment of the historic role of imperialism in the development of U.S. capitalism and in its struggle for global political, economic, and military hegemony is evident in the dominant mainstream accounts. The invasion of Iraq, ostensibly in search of non-existent weapons of mass destruction, is frequently characterized as a political aberration based on a failure of intelligence coupled with the most “idealistic” of intentions. The expanding U.S. Empire is openly exhibited as a source of pride for Americans, who are offered no serious understanding of the consequences, or of how this is viewed by the rest of the world.

It is not the purpose of this small book to provide an explanation for these failures of comprehension. Rather my intent is to show that an entirely different approach, rooted in the critique of imperialism and emanating from Marxist and radical-left thought generally, offers a much more consistent, powerful, and revealing perspective on these historical developments. In order to demonstrate this as concretely as possible I have followed the lead of Leo Huberman, Paul Sweezy, and Harry Magdoff in their classic account, *Vietnam: The Endless War* (1970) by deliberately avoiding in this book all argument from hindsight. The thirteen chapters here consist of editorial statements (known as “Reviews of the Month”) published in *Monthly Review* beginning in November 2001 (written shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 2001) and ending in January 2005. In addition, an introduction written in the preparation of this book and published in *Monthly Review* in September 2005 is included here. No changes of substance—beyond technical editing—have been introduced in any of the thirteen chapters.

All of the essays that compose this volume were written in direct response to the developing course of U.S. imperialism since September 2001, usually timed in relation to specific events. Since the chapters are arranged chronologically, a story unfolds throughout the book. Although the argument builds, it does so in response to rapid historical changes, many of which constituted turning points. Unfortunately, the emerging global tragedy already clearly pointed to in the first chapter is played out in the chapters that follow. None of this was truly inevitable. As potential agents of history we have the ability to act. A concerted global resistance, in which protest within the United States itself is crucial, can stop this process in its tracks—a message conveyed in one way or another at the end of nearly every chapter.

All of the essays in this book—with the exception of “The Empire of Barbarism,” co-authored with Brett Clark—were either written solely by me or were drafted primarily by me and co-authored with my *Monthly Review* co-editors, Harry Magdoff and Robert W. McChesney (who served as *Monthly Review* co-editor from April 2000 to June 2004). To Harry and Bob I owe everything. This book is in a very real sense theirs as well as mine. Others also read and gave input in the construction of all of these essays, including John Mage, John Simon, Michael Yates, Claude Misukiewicz, Victor Wallis, Fred Magdoff, and Brett Clark. There is not a chapter here that does not reflect the feedback of these individuals. At Monthly Review Press Andrew Nash, Martin Paddio, and Renee Pendergrass helped to bring the book to fruition.

If we live in an age of imperialism, it is all more necessary to be reminded that we belong to a world where basic humanity is also evident. I thank my children Saul and Ida Foster for what they share with me every day.

I dedicate this book to my wife Carrie Ann Naumoff in recognition of our shared commitments and her own struggles over her lifetime for a world of peace, justice, and human community.

*Eugene, Oregon*  
*November 2005*





## Introduction

**T**he global actions of the United States since September 11, 2001, are often seen as constituting a “new militarism” and a “new imperialism.” Yet, neither militarism nor imperialism is new to the United States, which has been an expansionist power—continental, hemispheric, and global—since its inception. What has changed is the nakedness with which this is being promoted, and the unlimited, planetary extent of U.S. ambitions.

Max Boot, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, insists that the “greatest danger” facing the United States in Iraq and around the world “is that we won’t use all of our power for fear of the ‘I’ word—imperialism. ... Given the historical baggage that ‘imperialism’ carries, there’s no need for the U.S. government to embrace the term. But it should definitely embrace the practice.” The United States, he says, should be “prepared to embrace its imperial rule unapologetically.” If Washington is not planning on “permanent bases in Iraq. ... they should be. ... If that raises hackles about American imperialism, so be it.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Deepak Lal, Professor of International Development Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, states: “The primary task of a Pax Americana must be to find ways to create a new order in the Middle East ... It is accusingly said by many that any such rearrangement of the status quo would be an act of imperialism and would largely be motivated by the desire to control Middle Eastern oil. Far from being objectionable, imperialism is precisely what is needed to restore order in the Middle East.”<sup>2</sup>

These views, although emanating from neoconservatives, are fully within the mainstream of U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, there is little dissent in U.S. ruling cir-

cles about current attempts to expand the American Empire. For Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, senior fellows at the Brookings Institution, “the real debate ... is not whether to have an empire, but what kind.”<sup>3</sup> Michael Ignatieff, director of Harvard University’s Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, states unequivocally: “This new imperialism ... is humanitarian in theory but imperial in practice; it creates ‘subsovereignty,’ in which states possess independence in theory but not in fact. The reason the Americans are in Afghanistan, or the Balkans, after all, is to maintain imperial order in zones essential to the interest of the United States. They are there to maintain order against a barbarian threat.” As “the West’s last military state” and its last “remaining empire,” the United States has a responsibility for “imperial structuring and ordering” in “analogy to Rome. ... We have now awakened to the barbarians. ... Retribution has been visited on the barbarians, and more will follow.”<sup>4</sup>

All of this reflects the realities of U.S. imperial power. In his preamble to the *National Security Strategy of the United States*, released in fall 2002, President George W. Bush declared that since the fall of the Soviet Union there was now “a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy and free enterprise,” as embodied concretely in U.S. capitalism. Any society that rejected the guidance of that model was destined to fail—and would, it was implied, be declared a security threat to the United States. The main body of the document that followed was an open declaration of Washington’s goal of strategic dominance over the entire planet for the indefinite future. It announced U.S. intentions of waging “preemptive” (or preventive) war against nations that threatened or in the future could conceivably threaten U.S. dominance directly—or that might be considered a threat indirectly through dangers they posed to U.S. friends or allies anywhere on the globe. Preventive actions would be taken, the new National Security Strategy emphasized, to ensure that no power would be allowed to rise up to rival the United States in military capabilities anytime in the future. On April 13, 2004, President Bush proclaimed that the United States needed to “go on the offensive and stay on the offensive,” waging an unrelenting war against all those it considered its enemies.

Since September 11, 2001, the United States has waged wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, expanded the global reach of its military base system, and increased the level of its military spending to the point that it now spends about as much on the military as all other nations of the world combined. Glorifying in the U.S. blitzkrieg

in Iraq, journalist Greg Easterbrook proclaimed in the *New York Times* that U.S. military forces are “the strongest the world has ever known ... stronger than the Wehrmacht in 1940, stronger than the legions at the height of Roman power.”<sup>5</sup>

Numerous critics on the U.S. left have responded by declaring, in effect, “Let’s throw the bastards out.” The U.S. government under the Bush administration, so the argument goes, has been taken over by a neoconservative cabal that has imposed a new policy of militarism and imperialism. For example, sociologist Michael Mann argues at the end of his *Incoherent Empire* that “a neoconservative chicken-hawk coup ... seized the White House and the Department of Defense” with George W. Bush’s rise to the presidency. For Mann the end solution is simply to “throw the militarists out of office.”<sup>6</sup>

The argument advanced here points to a different conclusion. U.S. militarism and imperialism have deep roots in U.S. history and the political-economic logic of capitalism. As even supporters of U.S. imperialism are now willing to admit, the United States has been an empire from its inception. “The United States,” Boot writes in “American Imperialism?,” “has been an empire since at least 1803, when Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory. Throughout the 19th century, what Jefferson called the ‘empire of liberty’ expanded across the continent.”<sup>7</sup> Later the United States conquered and colonized lands overseas in the Spanish-American War of 1898 and the brutal Philippine-American War that immediately followed—justified as an attempt to exercise the “white man’s burden.” After the Second World War the United States and other major imperialist states relinquished their formal political empires, but retained informal economic empires backed up by the threat and not infrequently the reality of military intervention. The Cold War obscured this neocolonial reality but never entirely hid it.

The growth of empire is neither peculiar to the United States nor a mere outgrowth of the policies of particular states. It is the systematic result of the entire history and logic of capitalism. Since its birth in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries capitalism has been a globally expansive system—one that is hierarchically divided between metropole and satellite, center and periphery. The objective of the imperialist system of today as in the past is to open up peripheral economies to investment from the core capitalist countries, thus ensuring both a continual supply of raw materials at low prices, and a net outflow of economic surplus from the periphery to the center of the world system. In addition, the third world is viewed as a source of cheap labor, constituting a global reserve army of labor. Economies of the periphery are structured to meet the external

needs of the United States and the other core capitalist countries rather than their own internal needs. This has resulted (with a few notable exceptions) in conditions of unending dependency and debt peonage in the poorer regions of the world.

If the “new militarism” and the “new imperialism” are not so new after all, but in line with the entire history of U.S. and world capitalism, the crucial question then becomes: Why has U.S. imperialism become more naked in recent years to the point that it has suddenly been rediscovered by proponents and opponents alike? Only a few years ago some theorists of globalization with roots in the left, such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Empire*, were arguing that the age of imperialism was over, that the Vietnam War was the last imperialist war.<sup>8</sup> Yet, today, imperialism is more openly embraced by the U.S. power structure than at any time since the 1890s. This shift can only be understood by examining the historical changes that have occurred in the last three decades since the end of the Vietnam War.

When the Vietnam War finally ended in 1975 the United States had suffered a major defeat in what, Cold War ideology notwithstanding, was clearly an imperialist war. The defeat coincided with a sudden slowdown in the rate of growth of the U.S. and world capitalist economy in the early 1970s, as the system’s old nemesis of secular stagnation reappeared. The vast export of dollars abroad associated with the war and the growth of empire created a huge Eurodollar market, which played a central role in President Richard Nixon’s decision to de-link the dollar from gold in August 1971, ending the dollar-gold standard. This marked the decline of U.S. economic hegemony. The energy crisis that hit the United States and other leading industrial states when the Persian Gulf countries cut their oil exports, as part of a general OPEC price increase and in response to Western support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, exposed the U.S. as vulnerable due to its dependence on foreign oil.

What conservatives labeled the “Vietnam Syndrome”—or the reluctance of the American population to support U.S. military interventions in third world countries—prevented the United States in this period from responding to the world crisis by setting its gargantuan military machine in motion. U.S. interventions were consequently reduced and breakaways from the imperialist system spread rapidly: Ethiopia in 1974, Portugal’s African colonies (Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau) in 1974–75, Grenada in 1979, Nicaragua in 1979, Iran in 1979, and Zimbabwe in 1980.

The most serious defeat experienced by U.S. imperialism in the late 1970s was the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that overthrew the Shah of Iran, who had been a lynchpin of U.S. military dominance over the Persian Gulf and its oil. In the wake of the revolution, and the energy crisis, the Middle East became an overriding concern of U.S. global strategy. In January 1980 President Jimmy Carter issued what came to be known as the Carter Doctrine: "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force." This was worded so as to parallel the Monroe Doctrine, which had established U.S. claims to dominance over the Americas, and had been employed as a putative "legal principle" with which to justify U.S. military invasions of other states in the hemisphere. The Carter Doctrine said, in effect, that the United States claimed military dominance of the Persian Gulf, which was to be brought fully within the American empire "by any means necessary." This assertion of U.S. power in the Middle East was accompanied by the onset of the CIA-sponsored war against Soviet troops in Afghanistan (the largest covert war in history), in which the United States enlisted fundamentalist Islamic forces including Osama Bin Laden in a holy war or jihad against Soviet occupying forces. The blowback from this war and the subsequent Gulf War was to lead directly to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

During the Reagan era in the 1980s the United States expanded its offensive, renewing the Cold War arms race while at the same time seeking to overturn the revolutions of the 1970s. In addition to prosecuting the covert war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, it provided military and economic assistance to Saddam Hussein's Iraq, supporting it in the Iraq-Iran War of 1980-1988, increased its direct military involvement in the Middle East (intervening unsuccessfully in Lebanon in the early 1980s and withdrawing only after the devastating 1983 bombing of the marine barracks), and sponsored covert operations designed to subvert unfriendly states and revolutionary movements throughout the globe. Major covert wars were instigated against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and against revolutionary forces in Guatemala and El Salvador. In 1983 the United States invaded the tiny island of Grenada, and under Reagan's successor, President George H. W. Bush, it invaded Panama in December 1989 as part of a campaign to reassert control over Central America.

But it was the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989 that represented the real sea change for U.S. imperialism. As Andrew Bacevich wrote in *American Empire*,

“just as victory in 1898 [in the Spanish-American War] transformed the Caribbean into an American lake, so too victory [in the Cold War] in 1989 brought the entire globe within the purview of the United States; henceforth American interests knew no bounds.”<sup>9</sup> Suddenly, with the Soviet Union withdrawing from the world stage (soon to collapse itself in the summer of 1991), the possibility of a full-scale U.S. military intervention in the Middle East was opened up. This occurred almost immediately with the Gulf War, commencing in the spring of 1991. The United States, although aware in advance of the impending Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, did not strongly oppose it until after it had taken place.<sup>10</sup> The Iraqi invasion offered the United States a pretext for a full-scale war in the Middle East. Between 100,000 and 200,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed in the Gulf War and at least 15,000 Iraqi civilians died directly from U.S. and British bombing of Iraq.<sup>11</sup> Commenting on what he believed was one of the chief gains of the war, President Bush declared in April 1991, “By God, we’ve licked the Vietnam Syndrome.”

Nevertheless, the United States at the time chose not to pursue its advantage and invade and occupy Iraq. Although there were undoubtedly numerous reasons for that decision, including the fact that it would probably not have been supported by the Arab members of the Gulf War coalition, the primary one was the geopolitical shift resulting from the collapse of the Soviet bloc. By then the Soviet Union itself was tottering. Uncertainty about the future of the Soviet Union and the geopolitical sphere it had controlled was such that Washington could not then afford the commitment of troops that a continuing occupation of Iraq would have entailed. The end of the Soviet Union came only months later.

During the remainder of the 1990s the United States (chiefly under Democratic President Bill Clinton) was to engage in major military interventions in the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe. This culminated in 1999 with the war in Yugoslavia (Kosovo) in which the United States, leading NATO, bombed for eleven weeks, followed by the insertion of NATO ground troops. Purportedly carried out to stop “ethnic cleansing,” the war in the Balkans was geopolitically about the extension of U.S. imperial power into an area formerly within the Soviet sphere of influence.

Already by the close of the twentieth century the power elite in the United States had therefore moved toward a policy of naked imperialism to a degree not seen since the opening years of the century—with the U.S. empire now conceived as planetary in scope. Even as a massive antiglobalization movement was emerg-

ing, notably with the Seattle protests in November 1999, the U.S. establishment was moving energetically toward an imperialism for the twenty-first century; one that would promote neoliberal globalization while resting on U.S. world dominance. “The hidden hand of the market.” Thomas Friedman, the Pulitzer-prize-winning *New York Times* columnist, opined, “will never work without a hidden fist—McDonald’s cannot flourish without a McDonnell Douglas, the builder of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies is called the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.”<sup>12</sup> The “hidden fist,” however, was only partly hidden, and was to become even less so in the ensuing years.

To be sure, the shift toward a more openly militaristic imperialism occurred only gradually, in stages. For most of the 1990s the U.S. ruling class and national security establishment had waged a debate behind the scenes on what to do now that the Soviet Union’s disappearance had left the United States as the sole superpower. Naturally, there was never any doubt about what was to be the main economic thrust of the global empire ruled over by the United States. The 1990s saw the strengthening of neoliberal globalization—the removal of barriers to capital throughout the world in ways that directly enhanced the power of the rich capitalist countries at the center of the world economy vis-à-vis the poor countries of the periphery. A key development was the introduction of the World Trade Organization to accompany the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as organizations enforcing the monopoly capitalist rules of the game. From the standpoint of most of the world, a more exploitative economic imperialism had raised its ugly head. Yet for the powers that be at the center of the world economy neoliberal globalization was regarded as a resounding success, notwithstanding signs of global financial instability as revealed by the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98.

U.S. ruling circles continued to debate, however, the manner and extent to which the United States should push its ultimate advantage and use its vast military power as a means of promoting U.S. global supremacy in the new “unipolar” world. If neoliberalism had arisen in response to economic stagnation, transferring the costs of economic crisis to the world’s poor, the problem of declining U.S. economic hegemony seemed to require an altogether different response—the reassertion of U.S. power as military colossus of the world system.

Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union the Defense Department under the administration of George H.W. Bush initiated a reconsideration of U.S.

national security policy in light of the changing global situation. The report, completed in March 1992 and known as the *Defense Planning Guidance*, was written under the supervision of Paul Wolfowitz, then undersecretary of policy in the Defense Department. It indicated that the chief national security goal of the United States must be one of “precluding the emergence of any potential global competitor.”<sup>13</sup> The ensuing debate within the U.S. establishment over the 1990s focused less on whether the United States was to seek global primacy than whether it should adopt a more multilateral (“sheriff and posse,” as Richard Haass dubbed it) or unilateral approach. Some of the dominant actors in what was to become the administration of George W. Bush, including Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, were to organize the Project for the New American Century, which in anticipation of Bush winning the White House, issued, at then vice-presidential candidate Dick Cheney’s request, a foreign policy paper, entitled *Rebuilding America’s Defenses*,<sup>14</sup> reaffirming the unilateral and nakedly aggressive strategy of the *Defense Planning Guidance* of 1992. Following September 11, 2001, this approach became official U.S. policy in *The National Security Strategy of the United States* of 2002. The beating of the war drums for an invasion of Iraq coincided with the release of this new declaration on national security—effectively a declaration of a new world war.

It is common, as we have noted, for critics to attribute these dramatic changes simply to the seizure of the political and military command centers of the U.S. state by a neoconservative cabal (brought into power by the disputed 2000 election), which, when combined with the added opportunity provided by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, led to a global imperial offensive and a new militarism. Yet, the expansion of American empire, in the wake of the Soviet Union’s demise was, as the foregoing argument has demonstrated, already well advanced at that time and had been a bipartisan project from the start. Under the Clinton administration the United States waged war in the Balkans, formerly part of the Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe, while also initiating the process of establishing U.S. military bases in Central Asia, formerly part of the Soviet Union itself. Iraq in the late 1990s was being bombed by the United States on a daily basis. When John Kerry as the Democratic presidential candidate in the 2004 election insisted that he would prosecute the war on Iraq and the war on terrorism if anything with greater determination and military resources—and that he differed only on the degree to which the United States adopted a lone vigilante as opposed to a sheriff and posse stance—he was merely continuing



what had been the Democratic stance on empire throughout the 1990s and beyond: an all but naked imperialism.

From the longer view offered by a historical-materialist critique of capitalism, the direction that would be taken by U.S. imperialism following the fall of the Soviet Union was never in doubt. Capitalism by its very logic is a globally expansive system. The contradiction between its transnational economic aspirations and the fact that politically it remains rooted in particular nation states is insurmountable for the system. Yet, ill-fated attempts by individual states to overcome this contradiction are just as much a part of its fundamental logic. In present world circumstances, when one capitalist state has a virtual monopoly of the means of destruction, the temptation for that state to attempt to seize full-spectrum dominance and to transform itself into the de facto global state governing the world economy is irresistible. As the noted Marxian philosopher István Mészáros observed in *Socialism or Barbarism?*—written, significantly, before George W. Bush became president: “[W]hat is at stake today is not the control of a particular part of the planet—no matter how large—putting at a disadvantage but still tolerating the independent actions of some rivals, but the control of its totality by one hegemonic economic and military superpower, with all means—even the most extreme authoritarian and, if needed, violent military ones—at its disposal.”<sup>15</sup>

The unprecedented dangers of this new global disorder are revealed in the twin cataclysms to which the world is heading at present: nuclear proliferation and hence increased chances of the outbreak of nuclear war, and planetary ecological destruction. These are symbolized by the Bush administration’s refusal to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to limit nuclear weapons development and by its failure to sign the Kyoto Protocol as a first step in controlling global warming. As former U.S. Secretary of Defense (in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations) Robert McNamara stated: “The United States has never endorsed the policy of ‘no first use,’ not during my seven years as secretary or since. We have been and remain prepared to initiate the use of nuclear weapons—by the decision of one person, the president—against either a nuclear or nonnuclear enemy whenever we believe it is in our interest to do so.”<sup>16</sup> The nation with the greatest conventional military force and the willingness to use it unilaterally to enlarge its global power is also the nation with the greatest nuclear force and the readiness to use it whenever it sees fit—setting the whole world on edge. The nation that contributes more to carbon dioxide emissions leading to global warn-

ing than any other (representing approximately a quarter of the world's total) has become the greatest obstacle to addressing global warming and the world's growing environmental problems—raising the possibility of the collapse of civilization itself if present trends continue.

The United States is seeking to exercise sovereign authority over the planet during a time of widening global crisis: economic stagnation, increasing polarization between the global rich and the global poor, weakening U.S. economic hegemony, growing nuclear threats, and deepening ecological decline. The result is a heightening of international instability. Other potential forces are emerging in the world, such as the European Community and China, which could eventually challenge U.S. power, regionally and even globally. Third world revolutions, far from ceasing, are beginning to gain momentum again, exemplified by Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution under Hugo Chávez. U.S. attempts to tighten its imperial grip on the Middle East and its oil have had to cope with a fierce, seemingly unstoppable, Iraqi resistance, generating conditions of imperial overstretch. With the United States brandishing its nuclear arsenal and refusing to support international agreements on the control of such weapons, insofar as they limit its own power, nuclear proliferation is continuing. New nations, such as North Korea, are entering or can be expected soon to enter the "nuclear club." Terrorist blowback from imperialist wars in the third world is now a well-recognized reality, generating rising fear of further terrorist attacks in New York, London, and elsewhere. Such vast and overlapping historical contradictions, rooted in the combined and uneven development of the global capitalist economy along with the U.S. drive for planetary domination, foreshadow what is potentially the most dangerous period in the history of imperialism.

The course on which U.S. and world capitalism is now headed points to global barbarism—or worse. Yet it is important to remember that nothing in the development of human history is inevitable. There still remains an alternative path—the global struggle for a humane, egalitarian, democratic, and sustainable society. The classic name for such a society is "socialism." Such a renewed struggle for a world of substantive human equality must begin by addressing the system's weakest link and at the same time the world's most pressing needs—by organizing a global resistance movement against the new naked imperialism.

## After the Attack ... the War on Terrorism

*November 2001*

**T**here is little we can say directly about the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.—except that these were acts of utter, inhuman violence, indefensible in every sense, taking a deep and lasting human toll. Such terrorism has to be rid from the face of the earth. The difficulty lies in how to accomplish this. Terrorism generates counterterrorism and the United States has long been a party to this deadly game, as perpetrator more often than victim.

The U.S. strategy of retaliation in the form of a global war on terrorism—already commencing on October 7 with military strikes in Afghanistan—is certain to compound this tragedy in the months and years ahead. For this reason it is now more important than ever that the realities of U.S. militarism and imperialism be brought to light, along with the role of propaganda in removing them from the scrutiny of the domestic population.

### *Militarism and U.S. Capitalism*

That the United States is the dominant global empire—the modern Rome—is crystal clear. Since the 1940s, if not earlier, the United States has been engaged in a struggle to maintain and even expand its position as the world's foremost military, economic, and political power. Today the United States accounts for about a third of all world military expenditures. It is the world's leading international arms

seller. And it has rained death and destruction on more people in more regions of the globe than any other nation in the period since the Second World War.

Consider the following. The United States has employed its military forces in other countries over seventy times since 1945, not counting innumerable instances of counterinsurgency operations by the CIA. In the Middle East/Islamic world alone, over the last twenty years the U.S. military:

- shot down Libyan jets in 1981;
- sent military personnel and equipment to the Sinai as part of a multinational force in 1982;
- sent marines to Lebanon in 1982;
- dispatched an AWACS electronic surveillance plane directed against Libya to Egypt in 1983;
- used AWACS electronic surveillance aircraft to aid Saudi Arabia in shooting down Iranian fighter jets in the Persian Gulf in 1984;
- fired missiles at and bombed Libya in 1986;
- shot down Libyan fighters in 1989;
- escorted Kuwaiti oil tankers during the Iraq-Iran war;
- fought the Gulf War against Iraq in 1991;
- fired missiles and carried out bombing strikes against Iraq on numerous occasions in the last decade;
- carried out military exercises in Kuwait (aimed at Iraq) in 1992;
- deployed its armed forces in Somalia in 1992;
- demolished one of the few pharmaceutical plants in Sudan in a missile attack in 1998;
- fired sixty cruise missiles equipped with cluster bombs at Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in 1998.
- commenced war operations in Afghanistan in 2001.<sup>1</sup>

More than a hundred thousand Iraqi civilians were killed in the Gulf War, and as many as a half million children have died as a result of U.S.-imposed sanctions since the war. U.S. support for Israel in the form of billions of dollars of military aid each year coupled with its refusal to rein in Israel's territorial ambitions have made it a principal party to the war of terror inflicted on the Palestinian people.

What explains this imperialist thrust? U.S. capitalism has been dependent since the Second World War on large infusions of military spending both to support its imperial interests abroad and to prop up the economy. In this respect the end of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Union had negative as well as positive consequences for the U.S. ruling class. How was the huge military budget of hundreds of billions of dollars a year to be justified with the disappearance of the “evil empire”? Tied up with this were the growing challenges to U.S. economic power from rival capitalist states, which during the Cold War period had generally submitted to U.S. interests within the context of the broad Cold War alliance.

In the years that have intervened since the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. ruling class has thus been seeking a substitute for the Cold War with which to justify its imperial designs. Various alternatives have been offered: a war on terrorism; the struggle against “rogue states”; a “clash of civilizations” (Islam and China vs. the West, as proposed by Samuel Huntington); a war on the global drug trade; and humanitarian intervention—all of them up to now seen as unsatisfactory, but sufficient to keep the military budget from shrinking drastically after the Cold War. Fortunately, a godsend appeared in the form of Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. But the rapid victory over Iraqi forces in the Gulf War was so complete and so devastating that Hussein could no longer serve as the credible threat needed to justify U.S. worldwide military commitments. As General Colin Powell voiced the problem in 1991, “Think hard about it. I’m running out of demons. I’m running out of villains.”<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that this was viewed as an insoluble dilemma within the corridors of power in the United States. Only weeks ago, at this writing, it looked like President Bush’s proposal to expand U.S. military spending through the creation of an anti-missile defense system (abandoning the ABM treaty forged with the Soviet Union) was going to have some stiff opposition in Congress—although most of the Bush program would no doubt have been adopted in the end, since both Republican and Democratic parties have continually supported increasing military expenditures.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have now changed all of that. The United States is gearing up for what is being touted as the first war of the millennium. For a Wall Street suffering from economic stagnation and growing uncertainty, the one bit of really good news is the skyrocketing virtually overnight of U.S. military expenditures with more

increases to be expected in the very near future, sending the stocks of military contractors soaring.

Notwithstanding the shock and horror associated with the terrorist attacks, the U.S. ruling class was quick enough to grasp this as an immediate opportunity for a new global military crusade of a scope approximating that of the Cold War; hence it wasted no time in fanning the flames of war. The militaristic response was cast in stone before the north tower of the World Trade Center fell to the earth. In President Bush's major speech to the nation on September 20, 2001, he indicted Osama Bin Laden and his terrorist network for the attacks and issued threats to the Taliban government in Afghanistan, indicating that they too were a target for having harbored the enemy. But he did not stop there. He also declared that "there are thousands of these terrorists in more than sixty countries. . . . Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime." The United States was entering into "a lengthy campaign unlike any we have seen," which would include dramatic military strikes and covert actions. Ground troops would be committed and losses could be expected. The United States would utilize "every necessary weapon of war" (the statement purposely did not exclude the use of nuclear weapons) against these enemies. "God," Bush exclaimed, "is not neutral," evoking the familiar Christian notion of divine retribution against sinners.

But behind this speech is a still more frightening reality. Congress, with only one dissenter (Representative Barbara Lee from California), has turned over to the President the power not only to conduct this ill-defined war as he pleases but also to define the enemy itself, which is already being projected as of worldwide scope. A war is to be fought, Bush and his administration made clear, and it is to take place in many different countries—extending to whole nations (which make better targets than hard to find terrorists). Yet, the U.S. public is still left in the dark as to who these additional enemies are—outside of Osama bin Laden and the Taliban in Afghanistan—or where the U.S. military will choose to strike next after Afghanistan. Bush's speech thus establishes the basis for a series of military interventions without definite geographical boundaries or moral restraints on the weapons to be used, and without any limits on the numbers or types of enemies to be encountered. On top of this is a plan for greatly expanded federal powers for the maintenance of internal security, including the creation of a cabinet-level Office of Homeland Security.

It is possible that given time the U.S. ruling class will split over some of these issues: the extent of the militarization; the number of countries that will be targeted in this war; and the infringements on the freedom of U.S. citizens. There will probably be pressure from allied nations to temper the militarism. But these are questions of degree. The U.S. power elite appears solidly behind a global expansion of the U.S. military role and severe global retaliation for the attacks. There can be no doubt that the world is facing what István Mészáros in his *Socialism or Barbarism* has called “the potentially deadliest phase of imperialism” resulting from the global-imperial projection of U.S. power.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Propaganda of Empire<sup>4</sup>*

A core tension in capitalist societies hampered by universal adult suffrage is how to reconcile inegalitarian economics with formally egalitarian politics. For those in power, the concern is an age-old one: how to keep the propertyless many from abridging the privileges of the wealthy few. Under democracy, only in a time of a crisis of the system can the solution be one of brute force. More generally the solution must be found in the realm of ideology or propaganda. The point is to depoliticize the masses or delude them so they will not act in their own interests.

The problem is even greater when the democratic capitalist society is also a major empire. The mass of the population must be persuaded to subsidize the expense of empire, though its benefits are hard to locate. And when the inevitable war comes the masses must be convinced to fight and die for the empire. Under conditions of democracy, to be frank and honest about the purpose and nature of imperialism would be counterproductive to these aims. Hence in Britain, empire was justified as a benevolent “white man’s burden.” And in the United States, imperialism does not even exist; “we” are merely protecting the causes of freedom, democracy, and justice worldwide.

It has proven to be a difficult job in the United States to enlist popular support for foreign war and empire. Since the late nineteenth century the U.S. government has worked aggressively to convince the citizenry of the necessity of going to war in numerous instances. In cases like the First World War, Korea, Vietnam, and the Gulf War, the government employed sophisticated propaganda campaigns to whip the population into a suitable fury. It was well understood within the establishment at the time—and subsequently verified in historical examinations—that the govern-

ment needed to lie in order to gain support for its war aims. The media system, in every case, proved to be a superior propaganda organ for militarism and empire.

This is the context for understanding the media coverage since September 11. The historical record suggests we should expect an avalanche of lies and half-truths in the service of power, and that is exactly what we have gotten. The U.S. news media—which love nothing more than to congratulate themselves for their independence from government control—did not so much as blink before they became the explicit agents of militarist and imperialist propaganda.

One way to grasp the extent of the propaganda barrage is to ask how a democratic society with a truly independent and free press would respond to events like those of September 11. In moments of crisis, a democratic media system needs to generate factual accuracy on everything relevant. It needs to be skeptical toward those in power and those who wish to be in power. And it needs to provide the basis for a wide range of debate over policy proposals to address the crisis, including historical background and context so that citizens can make sense of the problems and determine the best possible solution. Such a free press would “serve the governed, not the governors,” as Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black once put it.

Even allowing for the suddenness and merciless nature of the attack, none of these responses, which one could reasonably expect of a free and independent press, were evident in the U.S. media system in the weeks following September 11.

To the contrary, the Manichean picture conveyed by the media was as follows: A benevolent, democratic, and peace-loving nation was brutally attacked by insane evil terrorists who hate the United States for its freedoms and affluent way of life. The United States must immediately increase its military and covert forces, locate the surviving culprits and exterminate them; then prepare for a long-term war to root out the global terrorist cancer and destroy it. Those who do not aid the U.S. campaign for just retribution—and logically, this would mean domestically as well as internationally—are to be regarded as the accomplices of the guilty parties, and may well suffer a similar fate.

The reasons for this grossly distorted coverage go beyond notions of conspiracy, and reflect the weaknesses of professional journalism as it has been practiced in the United States, as well as the control of our major news media by a very small number of very large and powerful profit-seeking corporations.

Professional journalism emerged around one hundred years ago, propelled by the need of monopoly newspaper owners to offer a credible “non-partisan” jour-



nalism so that their business enterprises would not be undermined. To avoid the taint of partisanship, professionalism makes official or credentialed sources the basis for news stories. Reporters report what people in power say, and what they debate. This tends to give the news an establishment bias. When a journalist reports what elites are saying, or debating, she is professional. When she steps outside this range of official debate to provide alternative perspectives or to raise issues elites prefer not to discuss, she is no longer being professional. Most journalists have so internalized their primary role as stenographers for official sources that they do not recognize it as a problem for democracy.

In addition to this reliance on official sources, experts are also crucial to explaining and debating policy, especially in complex stories like this one. As with sources, experts are drawn almost entirely from the establishment, given that their main purpose is to express the consensus of those in power. Since September 11, the range of “expert” analysis has been limited mostly to the military and intelligence communities and their supporters, with their clear self-interest in the imposition of military solutions rarely acknowledged and almost never critically examined. Since there has been virtually no debate between the Democrats and Republicans over the proper response, the military approach has simply been offered as the only option. The obvious question, which should have been the first one off of any self-respecting journalist’s tongue, was beyond the pale: on what grounds are we to believe that spending tens of billions more on the military and CIA—the same people who failed to stop the September attacks with their existing bloated budgets—will solve this problem?

It is possible in the weeks and months to follow that the range of debate may broaden in elite circles. It is likely that some will assume the “liberal” and “internationalist” position that the United States should put the brakes on the full-throttle militarism and jingoism as that would prove to be counterproductive to long-term U.S. aims in the Middle East and the world. Those adopting this approach will inevitably argue that the United States needs to win the “hearts and minds” of potential adversaries through more sophisticated peaceful measures, as well as having an unmatched military. But fundamental issues will remain decidedly off-limits. The role of the military as the ultimate source of power will not be questioned. The notion that the United States is a uniquely benevolent force in the world will be undisputed. The premise that the United States and the United States alone—unless it deputizes a nation like Israel—has a right to invade any country it wants at any time it wishes will remain undebateable. And any concerns

that U.S. military action will violate international law—which it almost certainly will—will be raised not on principle, but only because it might harm U.S. interests to be perceived by other nations as a lawbreaker.

Here we should recall the media coverage of the U.S. invasion of Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. From the time the United States launched its ground invasion in earnest, in 1965, until late 1967 or early 1968, the news coverage was a classic example of the “big lie” of all war propaganda. The war was good and necessary for freedom and democracy; those that opposed it were trivialized, marginalized, distorted or ignored. By 1968, the coverage began to take a more charitable stance toward antiwar positions. But while it reflected growing public opposition to the war to a certain degree, this coverage was influenced much more by the break that emerged in U.S. elite opinion by this time: some on Wall Street and in Washington realized that the cost of the war was far too high for any prospective benefits and favored getting out. The news coverage remained within the confines of elite opinion. The United States still had a “007” right to invade any nation it wished; the only debate was whether the invasion of Vietnam was a proper use of that power. The notion that the very idea of the United States invading nations like Vietnam was morally wrong was off-limits, although surveys revealed that such a view was not uncommon in the general population.

Another flaw of establishment journalism is that it tends to avoid contextualization like the plague. The reason for this is that providing meaningful context and background for stories, if done properly, will tend to commit the journalist to a definite position and invite the very free and open debate that professional journalism is determined to avoid. So it is that on those stories that receive the most coverage, like the Middle East, the U.S. population tends to be every bit as, if not more, ignorant than on those subjects that receive far less coverage. The journalism is more likely to produce confusion, cynicism, and apathy than understanding and informed action. Coverage tends to be a barrage of disconnected facts—a perfect prescription for paralysis. What little contextualization professional journalism does provide tends to conform to elite premises.

The lack of context in the journalism since September 11 has been astonishing by almost any standards. There have been numerous detailed reports on Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network, and related investigations of factors concerning the success or failure of a prospective military invasion in Afghanistan, but otherwise the cupboard is bare. Consider the following: There has been a blackout on the subject of the role of the United States as arguably the

leading terrorist force in the world. In 1998, for example, Amnesty International released a report which made it clear that the United States was as responsible for extreme violations of human rights around the globe—including the promotion of torture and terrorism and the use of state violence—as any government or organization in the world.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. role in propping up corrupt regimes in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and its appalling record of supporting and bankrolling the Israeli assault on the Palestinians are outside the purview of most U.S. residents. Even relevant information about Osama bin Laden, such as the fact that he formerly received support from the CIA via Pakistan in the no-holds-barred war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, is rarely mentioned and never highlighted. Few individuals in the United States have obtained any clue from their news media about the heterogeneous nature of Islam and the Arab world—aside from the simplistic distinction between “moderate states” and “Islamic extremists.”

Beyond the professional code, U.S. media corporations exist within an institutional context that makes support for U.S. empire seemingly natural. These giant firms are among the primary beneficiaries of both neoliberal globalization (their revenues outside the United States are rapidly increasing) and the U.S. role as the preeminent world power. Indeed, the U.S. government is the primary advocate for the global media firms when trade deals and intellectual property agreements are being negotiated. For these firms to provide an understanding of the world in which the U.S. military and capitalism are not benevolent forces might be possible in theory, but it is incongruous practically.

In sum, the government, the military, and the corporate media are all in overdrive to sell the necessity, inevitability, and virtues of a war on terrorism with few boundaries, to be carried out by the most powerful military force on the planet. They need popular support but cannot afford to tell the simple, disarming truths. Much of the U.S. population, to its everlasting credit, is skeptical about such a militaristic response; hence the need for propaganda.

For those who seek to oppose U.S. militarism and imperialism and to promote peace in these dire circumstances, the road ahead is clear. We need to debunk the militaristic lies and build a broad coalition that will be able to turn back the war campaign. If we falter and Washington’s warlords are not stopped, history shows that the cost to humanity will continue to mount—to be paid mainly in the blood of the innocent in the poorest most exploited regions of the globe.



## Imperialism and “Empire”

*December 2001*

Only a little more than a month ago at this writing, before September 11, the mass revolt against capitalist globalization that began in Seattle in November 1999 and that was still gathering force as recently as Genoa in July 2001 was exposing the contradictions of the system in a way not seen for many years. Yet the peculiar nature of this revolt was such that the concept of imperialism had been all but effaced, even within the left, by the concept of globalization, suggesting that some of the worst forms of international exploitation and rivalry had somehow abated.

A growing fashion on the left in the treatment of globalization—one equally attractive to ruling circles judging by the attention given it by the mass media—is exemplified in a new book by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, entitled *Empire*. Published last year by Harvard University Press, this book has received unstinting praise in such places as *The New York Times*, *Time* magazine, and the *London Observer*, and has led to a guest appearance by Hardt on the *Charlie Rose Show* and an op-ed piece in *The New York Times*. Its thesis is that the world market under the influence of the information revolution is globalizing beyond the capacity of nation states to affect it. The sovereignty of nation states is vanishing, and is being replaced by a newly emerging global sovereignty or “Empire” arising from the coalescence of “a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule,” with no clear international hierarchy.<sup>1</sup>

Space does not allow me to deal with all aspects of this argument here. Rather I will comment on just one issue: the supposed disappearance of imperialism.

The term "Empire" in Hardt and Negri's analysis does not refer to imperialist domination of the periphery by the center, but to an all-encompassing entity that recognizes no limiting territories or boundaries outside of itself. In its heyday, "imperialism," they claim, "was really an extension of the sovereignty of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries."<sup>2</sup> Imperialism or colonialism in this sense is now dead. But Hardt and Negri also pronounce the death of the new colonialism: economic domination and exploitation by the industrial powers without direct political control. They insist that all forms of imperialism, insofar as they represent restraints on the homogenizing force of the world market, are doomed by that very market. Empire is thus both "postcolonial and postimperialist."<sup>3</sup> "Imperialism," we are told, "is a machine of global striation, channeling, coding, and territorializing the flows of capital, blocking certain flows and facilitating others. The world market, in contrast, requires a smooth space of uncoded and deterritorialized flows... *imperialism would have been the death of capital had it not been overcome*. The full realization of the world market is necessarily the end of imperialism."<sup>4</sup>

Concepts such as center and periphery, these authors argue, are now all but useless. "Through the decentralization of production and the consolidation of the world market, the international divisions and flows of labor and capital have fractured and multiplied so that it is no longer possible to demarcate large geographical zones as center and periphery, North and South." There are "no differences of nature" between the United States and Brazil, Britain and India, "only differences of degree"<sup>5</sup>

Also gone is the notion of U.S. imperialism as a central force in the world today. "*The United States*," they write, "*does not, and indeed no nation-state can today, form the center of an imperialist project*. Imperialism is over. No nation will be world leader in the way modern European nations were."<sup>6</sup> "The Vietnam War," Hardt and Negri state, "might be seen as the final moment of the imperialist tendency and thus a point of passage to a new regime of the Constitution."<sup>7</sup> This passage to a new global constitutional regime is shown by the Gulf War, during which the United States emerged "as the only power able to manage international justice, *not as a function of its own national motives but in the name of global right*. ... The U.S. world police acts not in imperialist interest but in imperial interest [that is, in the interest of deterritorialized Empire]. In this sense the Gulf War did indeed, as George Bush claimed, announce the birth of a new world order."<sup>8</sup>

Empire, the name they give to this new world order, is a product of the struggle over sovereignty and constitutionalism at the global level in an age in which a new global Jeffersonianism—the expansion of the U.S. constitutional form into the global realm—has become possible. Local struggles against Empire are opposed by these authors, who believe that the struggle now is simply over the form globalization will take—and the extent to which Empire will live up to its promise of bringing to fruition “the global expansion of the internal U.S. constitutional project.”<sup>9</sup> Their argument supports the efforts of the “multitude against Empire”—that is, the struggle of the multitude to become an autonomous political subject—yet this can only take place, they argue, within “the ontological conditions that Empire presents.”<sup>10</sup>

So much for today’s more fashionable views. I would now like to turn to the decidedly unfashionable. In contrast to *Empire*, István Mészáros’ new book *Socialism or Barbarism* represents in many ways the height of unfashionability—even on the left.<sup>11</sup> Instead of promising a new universalism arising potentially out of the capitalist globalization process if only it takes the right form, Mészáros argues that the perpetuation of a system dominated by capital would guarantee precisely the opposite: “Despite its enforced ‘globalization,’ capital’s incurably iniquitous system is structurally incompatible with universality in any meaningful sense of the term....there can be no universality in the social world without substantive equality.”<sup>12</sup>

For Mészáros, the rule of capital is best understood as a social metabolic process akin to that of a living organism. It thus has to be approached as embodying a complex set of relations. Whatever capitalism achieves with regard to “horizontal” liberation is negated by the dominant “vertical” ordering that always constitutes its decisive moment. This overriding antagonism means that “the capital system is articulated as a jungle-like network of contradictions that can only be more or less successfully *managed* for some time but never definitively *overcome*”<sup>13</sup> Among the principal contradictions that are insurmountable within capitalism are those between: (1) production and its control; (2) production and consumption; (3) competition and monopoly; (4) development and underdevelopment (center and periphery); (5) world economic expansion and intercapitalist rivalry; (6) accumulation and crisis; (7) production and destruction; (8) the domination of labor and dependence on labor; (9) employment and unemployment; and (10) growth of output at all costs and environmental destruction.<sup>14</sup> “It is quite inconceivable to overcome even a single one of these contradictions,” Mészáros

observes, “let alone their inextricably combined network, without instituting a radical alternative to capital’s mode of social metabolic control.”<sup>15</sup>

According to this analysis, the period of capitalism’s historic ascendance has now ended. Capitalism has expanded throughout the globe, but in most of the world it has produced only enclaves of capital. There is no longer any promise of the underdeveloped world as a whole “catching-up” economically with the advanced capitalist countries—or even of sustained economic and social advance in most of the periphery. Living conditions of the vast majority of workers are declining globally. The long structural crisis of the system, since the 1970s, prevents capital from effectively coping with its contradictions, even temporarily. The extraneous help offered by the state is no longer sufficient to boost the system. Hence, capital’s “destructive uncontrollability”—its destruction of previous social relations and its inability to put anything sustainable in their place—is coming more and more to the fore.<sup>16</sup>

At the core of Mészáros’ argument is the proposition that we are now living within what is “the potentially deadliest phase of imperialism” (the title of the second chapter of his book). Imperialism, he says, can be divided into three distinct historical phases: (1) early modern colonialism, (2) the classic phase of imperialism as depicted by Lenin, and (3) global hegemonic imperialism, with the U.S. as its dominant force. The third phase was consolidated following the Second World War, but it became “sharply pronounced” with the onset of capital’s structural crisis in the 1970s.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike most analysts, Mészáros argues that U.S. hegemony did not end in the 1970s, though by 1970 the U.S. had suffered a decline in its relative economic position vis á vis the other leading capitalist states when compared with the 1950s. Rather, the 1970s, starting with Nixon’s abandonment of the dollar-gold standard, mark the beginning of a much more determined effort on the part of the U.S. state to establish its global preeminence in economic, military and political terms—to constitute itself as a surrogate global government.

At the present stage of the global development of capital, Mészáros insists, “it is no longer possible to avoid facing up to a fundamental contradiction and structural limitation of the system. That limitation is its grave failure to constitute the state of the capital system as such, as complementary to its transnational aspirations and articulation.” Thus it is here that “the United States dangerously bent on assuming the role of the state of the capital system as such, subsuming under itself by all means at its disposal all rival powers,” enters in, as the closest thing to a “state of the capital system.”<sup>18</sup>



But the United States, while able to bring a halt to the decline in its economic position relative to the other leading capitalist states, has been unable to achieve sufficient economic dominance by itself to govern the world system—which is, in any case, ungovernable. It therefore seeks to utilize its immense military power to establish its global preeminence.<sup>19</sup> “What is at stake today,” Mészáros writes,

... is not the control of a particular part of the planet—no matter how large—putting at a disadvantage but still tolerating the independent actions of some rivals, but the control of its totality by one hegemonic economic and military superpower, with all means—even the most extreme authoritarian and, if needed, violent military ones—at its disposal. This is what the ultimate rationality of globally developed capital requires, in its vain attempt to bring under control its irreconcilable antagonisms. The trouble is, though, that such rationality—which can be written without inverted commas, since it genuinely corresponds to the logic of capital at the present historical stage of global development—is at the same time the most extreme irrationality in history, including the Nazi conception of world domination, as far as the conditions required for the survival of humanity are concerned.<sup>20</sup>

The claim that today’s imperialism, represented above all by the United States, is somehow lessened by the fact that there is little direct political rule of foreign territories, simply fails to understand the problems facing us. As Mészáros points out, European colonialism actually occupied only a small part of the territory of the periphery. Now the means are different, but the global reach of imperialism is even greater. The U.S. currently occupies foreign territory in the form of military bases in some sixty countries—a number that is continuing to increase. Further, “the multiplication of the destructive power of the military arsenal today—especially the catastrophic potential of aerial weapons—has to some extent modified the forms of imposing imperialist dictates on a country to be subdued [ground troops and direct occupation are less necessary] but not their substance.”<sup>21</sup>

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, it has become necessary for imperialism to take on new clothes. The old Cold War justification for interventions no longer works. Saddam Hussein, Mészáros observes, provided such a new justification, but only temporarily. Even then the United States was compelled to present its warmaking in the guise of a universal alliance in the interest of global right, albeit with the United States acting the part of both judge and executioner.

Among the disquieting developments that *Socialism or Barbarism* points to are: the enormous toll in Iraqi civilian casualties during the Gulf War and the death of more than a half million children as a result of sanctions since the war; the military onslaught on and occupation of the Balkans; the expansion of NATO to the East; the new U.S. policy of employing NATO as an offensive military force that can substitute for the United Nations; U.S. attempts to further circumvent and undermine the United Nations; the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade; the development of the Japan-U.S. Security treaty aimed at China; and the growth of an aggressive U.S. military stance with regard to China—increasingly seen as the emerging rival superpower. Over the longer run even the present apparent harmony between the United States and the European Union cannot be taken for granted, as the United States continues to pursue its quest for global domination. Nor is there an answer to this problem within the system at this stage in the development of capital. Globalization, Mészáros argues, has made a global state imperative for capital, but the inherent character of capital’s social metabolic process, which demands a plurality of capitals, makes this impossible. “The potentially deadliest phase of imperialism” thus has to do with the expanding circle of barbarism and destruction that such conditions are bound to produce.

How do these two views of globalization/imperialism—the increasingly *fashionable* one focusing on the emergence of global sovereignty (called “Empire”) and the decidedly *unfashionable* view pointing to “the potentially deadliest phase of imperialism”—look today, following the events of September 11 and the commencement in Afghanistan of a global war on terrorism?

It might perhaps be argued that the analysis of *Empire* is confirmed since it was not a nation state that offered a challenge to the emerging system of global sovereignty but international terrorists outside the Empire. In this view the United States could be seen as carrying out a “world police” action in Afghanistan “not as a function of its own national motives but in the name of global right”—as Hardt and Negri described the U.S. actions in the Gulf War. This is more or less the way Washington describes its own actions.

*Socialism or Barbarism*, however, would appear to suggest an altogether different interpretation, one that sees U.S. imperialism as central to the terror crisis. In this view, the terrorists attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were not attacking global sovereignty or civilization (it wasn’t the United Nations in New York that was attacked)—much less the values of freedom and democracy as claimed by the U.S. state—but were deliberately targeting the symbols of U.S.

financial and military power, and thus of U.S. *global* power. As unjustifiable as these terrorist acts were in every sense, they nonetheless belong to the larger history of U.S. imperialism and the attempt of the U.S. to establish global hegemony—particularly to the history of its interventions in the Middle East. Further, the United States responded not through a process of global constitutionalism, nor in the form of a mere police action, but imperialistically by unilaterally declaring war on international terrorism and setting loose its war machine on the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, the U.S. military is seeking to destroy terrorist forces that it once played a role in creating. Far from adhering to its own constitutional principles in the international domain the U.S. has long supported terrorist groups whenever it served its own imperialist designs, and has itself carried out state terrorism, killing civilian populations. Its new war on terrorism, Washington has declared, may require U.S. military intervention in numerous countries beyond Afghanistan—with such nations as Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines already singled out as possible locales for further interventions.

All of this, coupled with a worldwide economic downturn and increased repression in the leading capitalist states, seems to suggest that capital's "destructive uncontrollability" is coming more and more to the fore. Imperialism, in the process of blocking autocentric development—i.e., in perpetuating the development of underdevelopment—in the periphery, has bred terrorism, which has blown back on the leading imperialist state itself, creating a spiral of destruction without apparent end.

Since global government is impossible under capitalism, but necessary in the more globalized reality of today, the system, Mészáros insists, is thrown increasingly upon the "extreme violent rule of the whole world by one hegemonic imperialist country on a permanent basis: an ... absurd and unsustainable way of running the world order."<sup>22</sup>

Ten years ago, following the Gulf War, *Monthly Review* editors Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy observed:

The United States, it seems, has locked itself into a course with the gravest implications for the whole world. Change is the only certain law of the universe. It cannot be stopped. If societies [on the periphery of the capitalist world] are prevented from trying to solve their problems in their own ways, they will certainly not solve them in ways dictated by others. And if they cannot move forward, they will inevitably

move backward. This is what is happening in a large part of the world today, and the United States, the most powerful nation with unlimited means of coercion at its disposal, seems to be telling the others that this is a fate that must be accepted on pain of violent destruction.

Alfred North Whitehead, one of the greatest thinkers of the past century, once said: "I have never ceased to entertain the idea that the human race might rise to a certain point and then decline and never retrieve itself. Plenty of other forms of life have done that. Evolution may go down as well as up." It is an unsettling but by no means far-fetched thought that the form and active agency of this decline may be taking shape before our very eyes in these closing years of the twentieth century A.D.

This is of course not to suggest that irreversible decline is inevitable until it happens. But it is to suggest that the way things have been going for the last half century, and especially for the past year, holds that potential. And it is also to recognize that we, the American people, have a special responsibility to do something about it since it is our government that is threatening to play Samson in the temple of humanity.<sup>23</sup>

The last ten years have only confirmed the general validity of this analysis. By any objective standard, the United States is the most destructive nation on earth. It has killed and terrorized more populations around the globe than any other nation since the Second World War. Its power for destruction is seemingly unlimited, armed as it is with every conceivable weapon. Its imperial interests, aimed at global hegemony, are virtually without limits. In response to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, the U.S. government has now declared war on terrorists that it says reside in more than sixty countries and is threatening military action against the governments that harbor them. In what is presented as merely the first stage in a long struggle it has unleashed its war machine in Afghanistan, already taking a frightful human toll, including those who are perishing for want of food.

How are we to view these developments except as the growth of imperialism, barbarism, and terrorism—each feeding on the other—in an age in which capitalism seems to have reached the limits of its historic ascendance? What remaining hope there is for humanity, under these circumstances, lies with the rebuilding of socialism and, more immediately, with the emergence of a popular struggle centered within the United States—to prevent Washington from continuing its deadly game of Samson in the temple of humanity. Never have the words "socialism or barbarism," once eloquently raised by Rosa Luxemburg, taken on more global urgency than in the present day.

## Monopoly Capital and the New Globalization

*January 2002*

**W**e live at a time when capitalism has become more extreme, and is more than ever presenting itself as a force of nature, which demands such extremes. Globalization—the spread of the self-regulating market to every niche and cranny of the globe—is portrayed by its mainly establishment proponents as a process that is unfolding from everywhere at once with no center and no discernible power structure. As the *New York Times* claimed in its July 7, 2001 issue, repeating now fashionable notions, today’s global reality is one of “a fluid, infinitely expanding and highly organized system that encompasses the world’s entire population,” but which lacks any privileged positions or “place of power.”<sup>1</sup>

Even the revolutionary figure of Karl Marx has been enlisted in support of this view of inexorable global destiny, which seemingly determines everything, but which has no manifest agent of change. Thus the World Bank quoted from *The Communist Manifesto* on the opening page of its 1996 *World Development Report*, arguing that the transition from planned to market economies and the entire thrust of neoliberal globalization was an inescapable, elemental process, lacking any visible hand behind it:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation. . . . All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices, and opinions, are swept away,

all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air ...<sup>2</sup>

Gone—spirited away by ellipses—were Marx and Engels’ allusions in the same passage to “the bourgeois epoch” and their subsequent reference to how “the need for a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe.”

It is no doubt largely in response to this atmosphere of inevitability, in which globalization is divorced from all agency, that the movement against the neoliberal global project has chosen to exaggerate the role of the visible instruments of globalization at the expense of any serious consideration of historical capitalism. Radical dissenters frequently single out the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, and multinational corporations—and even specific corporations like McDonalds—for criticism, while deemphasizing the system and its seemingly inexorable forces.

These two distorted viewpoints, one generally in support of globalization, the other generally opposed, are mutually reinforcing in their unreality. Those who wish to intervene in these processes are thus left with no real material basis on which to ground their actions. Both perspectives have in common an emphasis on the decline of nation state sovereignty. Adam Smith described capitalism in the late eighteenth century as a system that eliminated all need for a sovereign power in the economic realm, replacing the visible hand of the absolutist or mercantilist state with the invisible hand of the market. “The Sovereign,” he wrote, “is completely discharged from a duty” with respect to the market.<sup>3</sup> Now we are told that this invisible hand has been globalized to such an extent that the sovereign power of nation states over their territorial domains themselves has been vastly diminished. For *New York Times* foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman, author of *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, globalization is a new technological-economic system based in the microchip and ruled by an “electronic herd” of financial investors and multinational corporations, free from any nation state or power structure, and beholden to none.<sup>4</sup>

Those seeking to dispel such views might reply that capitalism with all of its contradictions remains. But most current conceptions of capitalism are too lacking in historical specificity and concreteness, and too wrapped up in the notion of unfettered competition, to be useful in countering this dominant ideology. Indeed, the very idea of capitalism is being shorn of all determinate elements. The notion of global free market hegemony without the nation state and without dis-

cernible centers of power (only highly visible instruments of the market) means a concept of capitalism that has become virtually synonymous with globalization. There is, it is proclaimed, no alternative because there is nothing outside the system, and no center within the system.

The ideological fog that pervades all aspects of the globalization debate is bound to dissipate eventually, as it becomes clear that the contradictions of capitalism, which have never been surmounted, are present in more universal and more destructive form than ever before. For those seeking to penetrate this fog at present and to understand the constellation of forces in the world today what is needed above all is a concrete and historically specific conception of capitalism that will allow us to see through such issues as globalization. Within Marxism such an analysis was provided in the twentieth century by the theory of monopoly capitalism.

### *The Origins of Monopoly Capital Theory*

The term “monopoly capitalism” has been widely used within Marxian economics to refer to the stage of capitalism dominated by large corporations. This stage of capitalist development originated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and reached maturity about the time of the Second World War. Marx’s *Capital*, like the work of the other classical political economists, had assumed that the market system was characterized by conditions of free competition, in which capitalist enterprises were small, mainly family-run firms. Classical political economy never included such absolute fantasies as “perfect” or “pure” competition, which were to be imported into economics in its later neoclassical stage. Nevertheless, it assumed in its bedrock theory of free competition that price competition was fierce, and that no individual capitalist or firm had the power to control a significant portion of the market.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of Marx, as distinct from the other classical political economists, however, capitalism was a historical system, and thus dynamic in character, passing through various stages. Although Marx himself did not present a theory of monopoly capitalism, he did point to the concentration and centralization of capital as a fundamental tendency of accumulation under capitalism. The whole development of the credit system and the stock market was for Marx “a new and terrible weapon in the battle of competition and is finally transformed into an enormous social mechanism for the centralization of capitals.”<sup>6</sup> In preparing

Volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital* for publication two decades later, Engels emphasized the fact that free competition had reached “the end of its road.”<sup>7</sup> Marx and Engels, however, were prone to see these developments as signs of new conditions of socialization of production that would help usher in a new mode of production—not as indications of a new stage of capitalism.

It remained for later thinkers, therefore, to analyze what these developments meant for capitalism’s laws of motion. The first to do so was the heterodox U.S. economist Thorstein Veblen, who in *The Theory of Business Enterprise* and subsequent works, charted the economic implications of the rise of big business, and the transformations in credit, corporate finance, and forms of salesmanship that went along with it. But Veblen’s influence on economics did not extend beyond the United States. Within the Marxist tradition, then centered in Germany, the first important theorist of monopoly capitalism was the Austrian economist Rudolf Hilferding whose *Finance Capital: The Latest Phase of Capitalism* was soon followed by Lenin’s *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

Hilferding pointed to the tendency of concentration and centralization of capital to generate a greater and greater consolidation of capital, pointing eventually to one big cartel—an overly simplistic view that failed to perceive some of the countervailing influences at work. He saw these changes as mainly quantitative in character, and though his work was full of important insights, he did not explore the question of qualitative alterations in the laws of motion of capitalism. Hilferding’s perspective did, however, inspire Lenin to connect imperialism with the monopoly stage of capitalism, and to perceive the growth of giant capital therefore as integrally related to both the expansion of capital on the world stage, and the struggle between nation states for shares of the world market. But Lenin, like Hilferding before him, did not pursue the question of how capitalism’s basic laws of motion might be modified in the monopoly stage. The concept of monopoly capitalism was to remain axiomatic for Soviet economists in the 1920s and 1930s, during which some important new departures were begun. But by the late 1930s it had been reduced to a mere dogma within the rigid orthodoxy that prevailed under Stalinism.

In the 1930s in the West, meanwhile, mainstream academic economists—particularly Joan Robinson, Edward Chamberlain, and the young Paul Sweezy—finally began to deal with monopoly. Yet the theory of “imperfect competition” that was to emerge from their analyses had a formal character that was usually



divorced from real historical processes. Nor was it intended as more than a minor qualification to the theory of perfect competition, which continued to be considered the general rule, and prevailed over economics as a whole.

By the 1930s Marxian economics could be said to have three strands: (1) the theory of capital accumulation and crisis; (2) the beginnings of a theory of monopoly capitalism (based on Marx's concept of the concentration and centralization of capital); and (3) the theory of imperialism. The second and third strands—growing monopolization and imperialism—had been linked to each other by Lenin. But, paradoxically, there was no theoretical analysis that linked the second strand to the first—that is, no connection was drawn between growing concentration and centralization of capital and the forms of accumulation and crisis. The debate on economic crisis in Marxian theory, which in the early twentieth century centered on Marx's famous reproduction schemes in *Capital*, Volume 2, took place in a context that was completely separate from the analysis of the growth of monopoly.

Historical developments, however, were pointing to such a connection. Since the turn of the century in the United States there had been a groundswell of popular agitation against the giant monopolies and trusts. The great merger wave at the beginning of the twentieth century was widely viewed as representing a qualitatively new reality. It has been estimated that between a quarter and a third of all U.S. capital assets underwent consolidation in mergers between 1898 and 1902 alone. The mammoth merger of the period, the formation of U.S. Steel in 1901 under the financial guidance of the investment banking house of Morgan, fused 165 separate companies. The result was a monopolistic corporation controlling about 60 percent of the total U.S. steel industry. In 1936, Arthur R. Burns wrote his classic study, *The Decline of Competition: A Study of the Evolution of American Industry*.<sup>8</sup> And in the context of the Great Depression of the 1930s it was frequently contended within heterodox economic circles, especially among those under the influence of Veblen, that the stagnation was worsened by the growth of giant corporations with a large degree of monopoly power. One of the objects of the Temporary National Economic Committee established by the Roosevelt administration during the Great Depression was to investigate this question (though the results that they came up with in the end were quite meager).

Yet, despite all of this, John Maynard Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, which transformed macroeconomics in response to the depression, remained rooted in the age-old assumptions of atomistic competition.

The first economist to connect the theory of crisis to the theory of monopoly was the Polish economist Michal Kalecki, who drew his inspiration from Marx and Rosa Luxemburg. Kalecki's work in the early 1930s had developed, according to Joan Robinson and others in the circle of younger economists around Keynes, the main elements of the "Keynesian" revolution, in anticipation of Keynes himself. Kalecki moved to England in the mid-1930s where he helped further the transformation in economic analysis associated with Keynes. There he developed his concept of the "degree of monopoly," which stood for the extent to which a firm was able to impose a price mark-up on prime production costs (workers' wages and raw materials). In this way, Kalecki was able to link monopoly power to the distribution of national income, and to the sources of economic crisis and stagnation. Kalecki also explored the more general historical conditions affecting investment. In the closing paragraphs of his *Theory of Economic Dynamics* he concluded: "Long-run development is not inherent in the capitalist economy. Thus specific 'developmental factors' are required to sustain a long-run upward movement."<sup>9</sup>

This analysis was carried forward by Josef Steindl, a young Austrian economist who had worked closely with Kalecki in England. According to Steindl's *Maturity and Stagnation in American Capitalism*, giant corporations tended to promote widening profit margins, but were constantly threatened by a shortage of effective demand, due to the uneven distribution of income and resulting weakness of wage-based consumption. New investment could conceivably pick up the slack. Yet such investment resulted in new productive capacity, that is, an enlargement of the potential supply of goods. "The tragedy of investment," Kalecki wrote, "is that it is useful."<sup>10</sup> Giant firms, able to control to a considerable extent their levels of price, output, and investment, would not invest if large portions of their existing productive capacity were already standing idle. Confronted with a downward shift in final demand, monopolistic or oligopolistic firms would not lower prices (as in the perfectly competitive system assumed in most economic analysis) but would instead rely almost exclusively on cutbacks in output, capacity utilization, and new investment. In this way they would maintain, to whatever extent possible, existing prices and prevailing profit margins. The giant firm under monopoly capitalism was thus prone to wider profit margins (or higher rates of exploitation) and larger amounts of excess capacity than was the case for a freely competitive system, thereby generating a strong tendency toward economic stagnation.<sup>11</sup>

*Monopoly Capital: An Essay on  
the American Economic and Social Order*

The appearance in 1942 of Paul Sweezy's classic study *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, one of the great works in Marxian economics, marked the beginnings of a distinctive tradition of Marxian analysis within the United States—one that was later to become associated with the magazine *Monthly Review*, which Sweezy founded in 1949 along with historian and journalist Leo Huberman. In *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, Sweezy drew on Marx's theory of realization crisis—showing the close connection between that and Keynes' theory of effective demand—and developed a sophisticated analysis of economic stagnation. *The Theory of Capitalist Development* also extended the Marxian analysis of monopolization. But these two elements remained separate in his work.<sup>12</sup> It was this criticism that Steindl presented in a long discussion of Sweezy's book in *Maturity and Stagnation in American Capitalism*. Steindl went on to argue that a more unified theory could "be organically developed out of ... Marx" based on Kalecki's model of capitalist dynamics, which had connected the phenomenon of realization crisis to the increasing "degree of monopoly" in the economy as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

Sweezy was immediately impressed by Steindl's argument, as was Paul Baran, professor of economics at Stanford, and a close friend and associate of Sweezy and *Monthly Review*. In 1957, Baran published *The Political Economy of Growth*, which adapted the theory of monopoly capitalism arising from Kalecki and Steindl, while also analyzing the role of imperialism in reinforcing the economic underdevelopment of countries in capitalism's third world periphery.<sup>14</sup>

With respect to the latter part of his argument, Baran made a big departure from orthodox economics. Rather than following the common practice of assuming that the poorer economies of the periphery had always been relatively "backward," Baran approached the issue historically. "The question that immediately arises," he wrote, "is why is it that in the backward countries there has been no advance along the lines of capitalist development that are familiar from the history of other capitalist countries, and why is it that what forward movement there has been is either slow or altogether absent?"<sup>15</sup> The answer, he suggested, was to be found in the way in which capitalism was brought to these regions during the period of what Marx called "primitive accumulation," characterized by "undisguised looting, enslavement and murder," and in the way in which this very process has served to "smother fledgling industries" in the colonized societies.<sup>16</sup>

It was thus the European conquest and plundering of the rest of the globe that generated the great divide between the core and periphery of the capitalist world economy that persists to this day. In illustrating this, Baran highlighted the different ways in which India and Japan were incorporated into the world economy as a result of the globalizing tendencies of capitalism: the first as a dependent social formation carrying the unfortunate legacy of what Andre Gunder Frank was later to call “the development of underdevelopment”; the second representing the exceptional case of a society that was neither colonized nor subject for long to unequal treaties, and that, retaining control over its own economic surplus, was free to develop along the autocentric lines of the core European powers. The implication of this analysis was clear: incorporation on an unequal basis into the periphery of the capitalist world economy is itself the main cause of the plight of the underdeveloped countries.

For Baran, imperialism, in this sense, was inseparable from capitalism. Its central underpinnings were to be found in the mode of accumulation operating in the advanced capitalist world. An international division of labor had evolved that geared the production and trade of the poor countries in the periphery much more toward the needs of the rich countries in the center of the system than to the needs of their own populations.

No treatment of *contemporary* imperialism was complete, however, that did not take account of the laws of motion of *monopoly* capital. In *The Political Economy of Growth*, Baran applied the concept of economic surplus to analyze not only the development of underdevelopment in the periphery, but also to throw light on the problem of accumulation and stagnation within the United States and other leading capitalist nations. This argument was further extended in *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order*, coauthored with Paul Sweezy and published in 1966 two years after Baran’s death.<sup>17</sup> Between 1966 and 1974 *Monopoly Capital* was translated into sixteen languages and was “adopted ... almost immediately as a standard text” of the New Left.<sup>18</sup>

The basic dilemma of accumulation under monopoly capitalism was laid out in Kaleckian terms. Workers, the vast majority of the population in the rich countries, had little or no access to economic surplus in the forms of profit, interest, and rent. Workers’ income was almost exclusively wage income. Most working people lived from paycheck to paycheck (though sometimes able to make large purchases on credit), and had no savings to speak of. Workers therefore spent what they got on necessities, or what economists sometimes called wage goods.

Capitalists, in contrast, had access to economic surplus and had as their main goal accumulation of even greater surplus. They spent a small portion of their total income on luxury goods for their private consumption, but mainly sought to ensure the enhancement of their wealth through investment in capital goods—new productive capacity. But here a dilemma entered in: if all investment-seeking surplus was invested in new productive capacity (new plant and equipment), that new capacity, once it came on stream, would result in a total capacity to produce goods that might well exceed final demand, leading to overproduction, declining prices and rapidly falling profits. In order to prevent such a situation from developing and in order to prevent price reductions that would threaten profit margins, monopoly capital held down production levels, increasing the normal amount of idle productive capacity and carefully regulating investment. Yet all of this meant that the surplus that the system was actually and potentially capable of producing normally exceeded the capacity to absorb that surplus. The result was a trend rate of economic growth well below the potential.

Monopolization, this theory argued, was not the only historical element serving to slow down capital accumulation. Also important was the phenomenon of “maturity” emphasized by Keynes’ leading U.S. follower Alvin Hansen during the debates on secular stagnation in the 1930s. Investment, in this perspective, had to be viewed historically. Most new industries went through a highly competitive shakedown phase in which prices tended to fall and investment took a highly dynamic character. But once such industries had “matured,” with more productive capacity built-up than they could normally utilize—and once these industries had also fallen under the sway of three or four monopolistic or oligopolistic firms—investment tended to fall off. What investment took place was supplied increasingly out of depreciation funds with relatively little new net investment. Moreover, the nature of industrialization was such that in the highly developed economies a larger and larger portion of industry would consist of mature markets in this sense.

The overall theory thus suggested that the stagnation that had characterized the 1930s was not simply an anomaly, but reflected conditions deeply embedded in the laws of motion of capitalism in its monopoly stage. Yet, the immediate reality at the time that *Monopoly Capital* was written was not stagnation but rapid economic growth. As Baran and Sweezy wrote in the introduction to their book: “The Great Depression of the 1930’s accorded admirably with Marxian theory, and its occurrence of course strengthened the belief that similar catastrophic eco-

conomic breakdowns were inevitable in the future. And yet, much to the surprise of many Marxists, two decades have passed since the end of the Second World War without the recurrence of severe depression.”<sup>19</sup>

If a monopoly capitalist economy was prone to economic crisis and stagnation, how had the U.S. economy managed to expand for two decades without a major crisis? This was the question that *Monopoly Capital* sought above all to answer. Baran and Sweezy singled out a number of countervailing factors that had served to prop up the economy: (1) the epoch-making stimulus provided in the 1950s by a second great wave of automobilization in the United States (which was to be understood as also encompassing the expansion of the steel, glass, rubber, and petroleum industries, the building of the interstate highway systems, and the stimulus provided by suburbanization); (2) Cold War military spending, including two regional wars in Asia; (3) the growing wasteful penetration of the sales effort into production (a point first emphasized by Veblen); and (4) the vast expansion of financial superstructure of the capitalist economy, to the extent that it even began to dwarf production itself. (This last element was mentioned in Baran and Sweezy’s analysis, but given much more emphasis in Sweezy’s later writings than in *Monopoly Capital* itself). Through these means the U.S. economy managed to absorb surplus and thus to stave off a severe economic crisis.

All of these countervailing factors, however, were either self-limiting, or produced additional contradictions for monopoly capitalist society. Automobilization represented a shift in the entire geographical basis of the economy; and once these effects had been achieved the process slowed down. Moreover, no new epoch-making innovation on the same scale seemed to be on the horizon—even the digital revolution in recent decades has been small in comparison in its effect on overall investment. The emphasis on military spending committed the United States, which now accounts for roughly a third of all military spending in the world, to global militarism and imperialism—and to the search for new justifications for a large and expanding arms budget once the Cold War had ended. The penetration of the sales effort into the production process meant the production of huge amounts of waste (unnecessary packaging, useless products, throwaway goods and product obsolescence). Naturally, this was not without its effects on business costs and competition. The skyrocketing growth of the financial superstructure of the capitalist economy at the same time as the relative stagnation of its productive base could only contribute to the uncertainty and instability of capitalist economies worldwide.

*Monopoly Capital* dealt with the changing nature of competition, the modifications in accumulation, and the growing militarism and imperialism under monopoly capitalism. It largely ignored, however, a question at the heart of Marx's critique of capitalism: the labor process itself, and the exploitation of workers. This topic was taken up by Harry Braverman, director of Monthly Review Press and a former skilled machinist in the metal-working industries, in his magnum opus, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*.<sup>20</sup> Braverman, while rooting his analysis in Marx's *Capital*, applied this to the growth of scientific management or Taylorism, which had emerged along with the giant corporation at the beginning of the twentieth century. He showed that the forces directed at the extraction of ever greater amounts of surplus from the direct producers by means of the relentless division and subdivision of labor, and hence the degradation and dehumanization of work, had only intensified under monopoly capitalism. At the same time, the "universalization of the market," to the point that all aspects of social existence became dependent upon it, represented the hidden set of chains behind the much-celebrated growth of "consumer society."<sup>21</sup>

Another extension of the theory of monopoly capitalism was provided in the work of Harry Magdoff—who in 1969, following Leo Huberman's death, became coeditor with Sweezy of *Monthly Review*. Magdoff's *The Age of Imperialism: The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy* had as its object nothing less than the rediscovery of the long suppressed topic of U.S. imperialism.<sup>22</sup> It demonstrated that the United States had an empire, although one different from the empires of Britain and France that had preceded it. This, even more than the contest with the Soviet Union, was the context in which the Vietnam War, then taking place, had to be understood. Arguing against the widespread view that the U.S. economy had very little involvement in the world economy, Magdoff emphasized the flow of foreign direct investment abroad and its effect in creating a cumulative stock of investment generating a return flow of earnings. He criticized the common error of simply comparing exports or the foreign investment of multinational corporations to the gross domestic product. Rather, the importance of these economic flows could only be gauged by relating them to strategic sectors of the economy, such as the capital goods industries; or by comparing the earnings on foreign investment to the profits of domestic nonfinancial corporations. Earnings from overseas investments, Magdoff pointed out, had grown from 10 percent of after-tax profits for U.S. nonfinancial corporations in

1950, to over 20 percent in 1964.<sup>21</sup> In answer to the question “Is Imperialism Necessary?” Magdoff insisted that imperialism was the global face of capitalism—as fundamental to the system as accumulation itself.<sup>24</sup>

The formation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank after the Second World War facilitated, Magdoff argued, the development of an international order in which the United States assumed a hegemonic position. He emphasized the international financial expansion of U.S. capital, based on the dollar’s hegemonic position in the world economy, and the growth at the same time of a debt trap in the third world. In the closing pages of *The Age of Imperialism*, Magdoff wrote:

The typical international business firm is no longer limited to the giant oil company. It is as likely to be a General Motors or a General Electric—with 15 to 20 percent of its operations involved in foreign business, and exercising all efforts to increase this share. It is the professed goal of these international firms to obtain the lowest unit production costs on a world-wide basis. It is also their aim, though not necessarily openly stated, to come out on top in the merger movement in the European Common Market and to control as large a share of the world market as they do of the United States market.<sup>25</sup>

### *The New Stage of Globalization*

The theory of monopoly capital developed by Sweezy, Baran, Magdoff, and Braverman, on foundations laid by Marx, Veblen, Hilferding, Lenin, Kalecki, and Steindl, thus pointed early on to many of the phenomena that are now commonly associated with “globalization.” But in this perspective, capitalism had been a global system from the start. Although one could refer to a “new stage of globalization,” it was part of a long historical process, inseparable from imperialism.<sup>26</sup> Capitalism, as Sweezy stressed, had emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. From its earliest infancy the system had been constituted as “a dialectical unity of self-directed center and dependent periphery.” Further:

The fact that capitalism has from the beginning had these two poles—which can be variously described by such terms as independent and dependent, dominant and subordinate, developed and underdeveloped, center and periphery—has at every stage been crucial for the evolution of its parts. The driving force has always been



the accumulation process in the center, with the peripheral societies being molded by a combination of coercion and market forces to conform to the requirements and serve the needs of the center.<sup>27</sup>

Within this global system much higher rates of exploitation were to be found in the periphery than in the center; and at the same time surplus was siphoned off from the periphery to meet the development needs of the center. Consequently, the gap in income and wealth between the center and the periphery as a whole has tended to increase, despite development in some peripheral countries. Conflict between center and periphery was therefore inevitable, oftentimes taking the form of revolution and counterrevolution (the latter invariably supported by the United States and other imperial powers in the center of the system, sometimes through direct military intervention).

The struggle over imperialism, however, did not simply occur between North and South. As Lenin had argued, the growth of monopoly capital was inseparable from rivalry among the advanced industrialized nations within the center of the world system, taking the form of trade and currency conflicts, struggles arising out of the promotion of their respective national corporations, and even leading to war (as in the First and Second World Wars). Much of this imperialist rivalry was directed at spheres of influence and control in the periphery, with each of the great powers laying primary claim to certain dependent regions.

Concentration and centralization of capital, stagnation tendencies in the center, imperialist exploitation in the periphery, globalization of finance, and imperial rivalry between the advanced capitalist countries—together made up the general picture of the world developed by monopoly capital theory. This generated an approach to the latest phase of globalization entirely different from those most commonly encountered today. National sovereignty in the center of the system (as opposed to the periphery), according to the perspective of monopoly capital theory, was not eroded. The world economy was seen neither as chaotic, in the sense of a lack of powerful organizing forces, nor, as some contended, as giving rise to a new international of capital led by the WTO and other supranational organizations. “For the sake of perspective,” Magdoff explained in his treatise, *Globalization—To What End?*:

it is worth recognizing that the recent splurge in globalization is part of an ongoing process with a long history. To begin with, capitalism was born in the process of cre-

ating a world market, and the long waves of growth in the core capitalist countries were associated with its centuries-long spread by conquest and economic penetration. In the past as in the present, competitive pressures, the incessant need for capital to keep on accumulating, and the advantages of controlling raw material sources have spurred business enterprise to reach beyond its national borders. . . . While the expansion of capitalism has always presupposed and indeed required cooperation among its various national components. . . . there has never been a time when these same national components ceased to struggle each for its own preferment and advantage. Centrifugal and centripetal forces have always coexisted at the very core of the capitalist process, with sometimes one and sometimes the other predominating. As a result, periods of peace and harmony have alternated with periods of discord and violence. Generally, the mechanism of this alternation involves both economic and military forms of struggle, with the strongest power emerging victorious and enforcing acquiescence on the losers. But uneven development soon takes over, and a period of renewed struggle for hegemony emerges.<sup>28</sup>

The “strongest power” at present remains the United States, which has managed to maintain a global hegemonic imperialism since 1945. This hegemony has been under challenge from other leading capitalist countries since the 1970s. The United States has sought to maintain its preeminent position at every opportunity—through an expansion of its role as the leading military power, and by wielding its economic and financial might. “The fact that U.S. hegemonic imperialism proved to be so successful, and still continues to prevail,” István Mészáros has explained, “does not mean that it can be considered stable, let alone permanent. The envisaged ‘global government’ under U.S. management remains wishful thinking, like the ‘Alliance for Democracy’ and the ‘Partnership for Peace,’ projected—at a time of multiplying military collisions and social explosions—as the solid foundation of the newest version of the ‘new world order.’” Instead what is emerging is the “potentially deadliest phase of imperialism” evident in: (1) growing rivalry between the United States, Europe and Japan; (2) increasing concern within U.S. ruling circles about the potential threat represented by China, viewed as an emerging superpower rival; and (3) aggressive U.S. attempts to preempt such challenges by extending the geopolitical sphere of its hegemony.<sup>29</sup> All the talk about globalization having integrated the world and disintegrated all centers, eliminating all sovereign powers, is largely illusion. Nation state sovereignty and U.S. imperialism have not gone

away but continue to exist in this new phase of capitalist globalization in an explosive mixture.

Globalization of capital in the present stage of capitalism is thus inseparable from increasing monopolization, that is, the concentration and centralization of capital on a world scale—which necessarily produces bigger contradictions and crises. “The three most important underlying trends in the recent history of capitalism, the period beginning with the recession of 1974-75,” Sweezy argued in *Monthly Review* in 1997, were: “(1) the slowing down of the overall rate of growth, (2) the worldwide proliferation of monopolistic (or oligopolistic) multinational corporations, and (3) what may be called the financialization of the capital accumulation process.” All of these underlying trends were a product of the driving force of capitalism, the capital accumulation process itself, rather than arising from globalization—which was to be seen as a process that has been going on as long as capitalism, but which could only be understood in terms of the latter. Nevertheless, all three of these “underlying trends,” associated with capital accumulation, Sweezy was to emphasize, must be seen as taking place in “a context of continuing globalization which puts its imprint on the way the various processes play themselves out.”<sup>30</sup>

What is perhaps most evident is that stagnation, monopolization, financialization, and the new phase of globalization, all combine to generate quite new and highly visible power mechanisms. As British political economist Michael Barratt Brown wrote in his *Models in Political Economy*, “the system of production for profit in the market is still what organizes production. But the hand is no longer invisible, decisions are no longer unplanned. It is increasingly obvious that the hand is the hand of the managers of a few giant companies playing the market and planning the use of the world’s resources to make money rather than to meet wants. More and more people can see this is so.”<sup>31</sup>

Rather than representing the realization of Adam Smith’s invisible hand on a global scale—a seemingly inexorable mechanistic reality against which there is no recourse—capitalism is more and more a contested sphere, in which concentration and centralization of production on a world scale and hence increasingly global competition between firms has its counterpart in the globalization of exploitation. Struggles over nation state hegemony have not disappeared in this new stage of globalization, but continually resurface, often in more potent form.

Globalization as the end of history, as the end of nation state sovereignty, as a new world order, as the integration of all peoples, or as a reality for which there is

no alternative, are all myths carefully cultivated in our time. To see through these establishment myths—along with the “progressive” myth that we can oppose the instruments of neoliberal globalization without opposing the system itself—it is necessary to understand the historical changes associated with the development of monopoly capital on an increasingly global scale. Neither capitalism’s monopolistic tendencies nor its imperialist divisions are in any way surmounted by the new globalization. At most these contradictions simply assume more universal forms. More than ever before a world of globalized monopoly capital and hegemonic imperialism, led by the United States, presents us with a stark choice: between a deadly barbarism or a humane socialism.

## U.S. Military Bases and Empire

March 2002

### *The Bases of Empire*

**E**mpires throughout human history have relied on foreign military bases to enforce their rule, and in this respect at least, Pax Americana is no different than Pax Romana or Pax Britannica. “The principal method by which Rome established her political supremacy in her world,” wrote historian Arnold Toynbee in his *America and the World Revolution*,

was by taking her weaker neighbors under her wing and protecting them against her and their stronger neighbors. Rome’s relation with these protégées of hers was a treaty relation. Juridically they retained their previous status of sovereign independence. The most that Rome asked of them in terms of territory was the cessation, here and there, of a patch of ground for the plantation of a Roman fortress to provide for the common security of Rome’s allies and Rome herself.

At least this is the way Rome started out. But as time passed, “the vast territories of Rome’s one-time allies,” originally secured by this system of Roman military bases, “became just as much a part of the Roman Empire as the less extensive territories of Rome’s one time enemies which Rome had deliberately and overtly annexed.”<sup>1</sup>

Britain, in its heyday as the leading capitalist power in the nineteenth century, ruled over a vast colonial empire secured by a global system of military bases. As Robert Harkavy has explained in his important work, *Great Power Competition for Overseas Bases*, these were deployed in four networks along sea corridors dominat-

ed by British naval power: (1) the Mediterranean through Suez to India; (2) South Asia, the Far East, and the Pacific; (3) North America and the Caribbean; and (4) West Africa and the South Atlantic. At the British empire's peak these military bases were located in more than thirty-five separate countries or colonies. Although British hegemony declined rapidly in the early twentieth century, its bases were retained as long as the empire itself continued, and its base system even expanded briefly during the Second World War. In the immediate aftermath of the war, however, the British Empire crumbled, and the great majority of bases had to be relinquished.<sup>2</sup>

The fall of the British empire was accompanied by the rise of another, as the United States took Britain's place as the hegemonic power of the capitalist world economy. The United States emerged from the Second World War with the most extensive system of military bases that the world had ever seen. According to James Blaker, former Senior Advisor to the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this overseas basing system at the end of the Second World War consisted of over thirty thousand installations located at two thousand base sites residing in around one hundred countries and areas, and stretching from the Arctic Circle to Antarctica. U.S. military bases were spread over all the continents and the islands in between. "Next to the U.S. nuclear monopoly," Blaker writes, "there was no more universally recognized symbol of the nation's superpower status than its overseas basing system."<sup>3</sup>

The official stance of the United States toward these military bases after the war was that they should be retained to whatever extent possible, and further bases should be acquired. At the Potsdam Conference on August 7, 1945, President Harry Truman declared:

Though the United States wants no profit or selfish advantage out of this war, we are going to maintain the military bases necessary for the complete protection of our interests and of world peace. Bases which our military experts deem to be essential for our protection we will acquire. We will acquire them by arrangements consistent with the United Nations Charter.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the dominant trend from the end of the Second World War until the Korean War was the reduction of the number of U.S. overseas bases. "Half the wartime basing structure," according to Blaker, "was gone within two years of V-J Day, and half of what had been maintained until 1947 had been dismantled by 1949."<sup>5</sup> This postwar reduction in the number of overseas bases, however, ended with the Korean War when the quantity of such bases increased

once more, followed by further increases during the Vietnam War. Only after the Vietnam War did the number of U.S. overseas base sites begin to fall once again. By 1988, these bases numbered slightly less than at the end of the Korean War, but reflected a very different global pattern than at the beginning of the post-Second World War period, with the sharpest declines in South Asia and Middle East/Africa (see Table 1).

Table 1-1: *U.S. Overseas/Foreign Bases by Region, 1947-1988*

	1947	1949	1953	1957	1967	1975	1988
Europe, Canada, & North Atlantic	506	258	446	566	673	633	627
Pacific & Southeast Asia	343	235	291	256	271	183	121
Latin America & the Caribbean	113	59	61	46	55	40	39
Middle East & Africa	74	28	17	15	15	9	7
South Asia	103	2	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,139</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>883</b>	<b>1,014</b>	<b>865</b>	<b>794</b>

Source: James R. Blaker, *United States Overseas Basing* (New York: Praeger, 1990), Table 1.2

Historically, bases have often been acquired during wars. For example, the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo, Cuba, was obtained in the aftermath of the Spanish American War. Although that base is technically “leased,” the lease is permanent. According to the treaty, U.S. jurisdiction over the base can be terminated only by the mutual consent of both Cuba and the United States as long as nominal annual payments are made—giving the United States “rights” to this part of Cuba in perpetuity, regardless of the views of the Cuban government and people. Since the Cuban Revolution, the checks issued on behalf of the United States to pay for the leasing of the base have been cashed only once (in the case of the first such check paid after the revolution). All subsequent checks have simply been held by Cuba, without being cashed, in line with Cuba’s demand that the base be removed from its territory.

Many current U.S. bases were acquired in subsequent wars—the Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and the war in Afghanistan. U.S. military bases in Okinawa, formally part of Japan, are a legacy of the U.S. occupation of Japan during the Second World War.

Like all empires, the United States has been extremely reluctant to relinquish any base once acquired. Bases obtained in one war are seen as forward deployment positions for some future war, often involving an entirely new enemy. According to a December 21, 1970, report issued by the Subcommittee on Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations,

Once an American overseas base is established it takes on a life of its own. Original missions may become outdated but new missions are developed, not only with the intention of keeping the facility going, but often to actually enlarge it. Within the government departments most directly concerned—State and Defense—we found little initiative to reduce or eliminate any of these overseas facilities.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s the United States articulated a specific doctrine of “strategic denial” that argued that no withdrawal should be made from any base that could potentially be acquired thereafter by the Soviet Union. The majority of U.S. bases were justified as “ringing” and “containing” Communism. Yet, upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States sought to retain its entire basing system on the grounds that this was necessary for the global projection of its power and the protection of U.S. interests abroad.

### *After the Cold War*

Glasnost and perestroika in the late 1980s, followed by the collapse of the Soviet-dominated regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the demise of the Soviet Union itself in 1991, generated a strong expectation, particularly among those who had swallowed the claim that U.S. bases were simply there to contain the Soviet threat, that there would be a rapid dismantling of the U.S. basing system. Yet, the Department of Defense insisted in its annual *Report of the Secretary of Defense* in 1989 that the “power projection” of the United States necessitated such “forward deployments.”<sup>7</sup>

On August 2, 1990, President George Herbert Walker Bush issued a statement indicating that, while the U.S. overseas basing system should remain intact, by 1995 U.S. global security requirements might be met by an active force 25 percent smaller than in 1990. On that same day Iraq invaded Kuwait. The massive introduction of U.S. troops into the Middle East during the Gulf War led to the proclamation of a New World Order rooted in U.S. hegemony and U.S. military power. “By God



we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all," Bush declared.<sup>8</sup> New military bases in the Middle East were established, most notably in Saudi Arabia, where thousands of U.S. troops have been stationed for more than a decade.

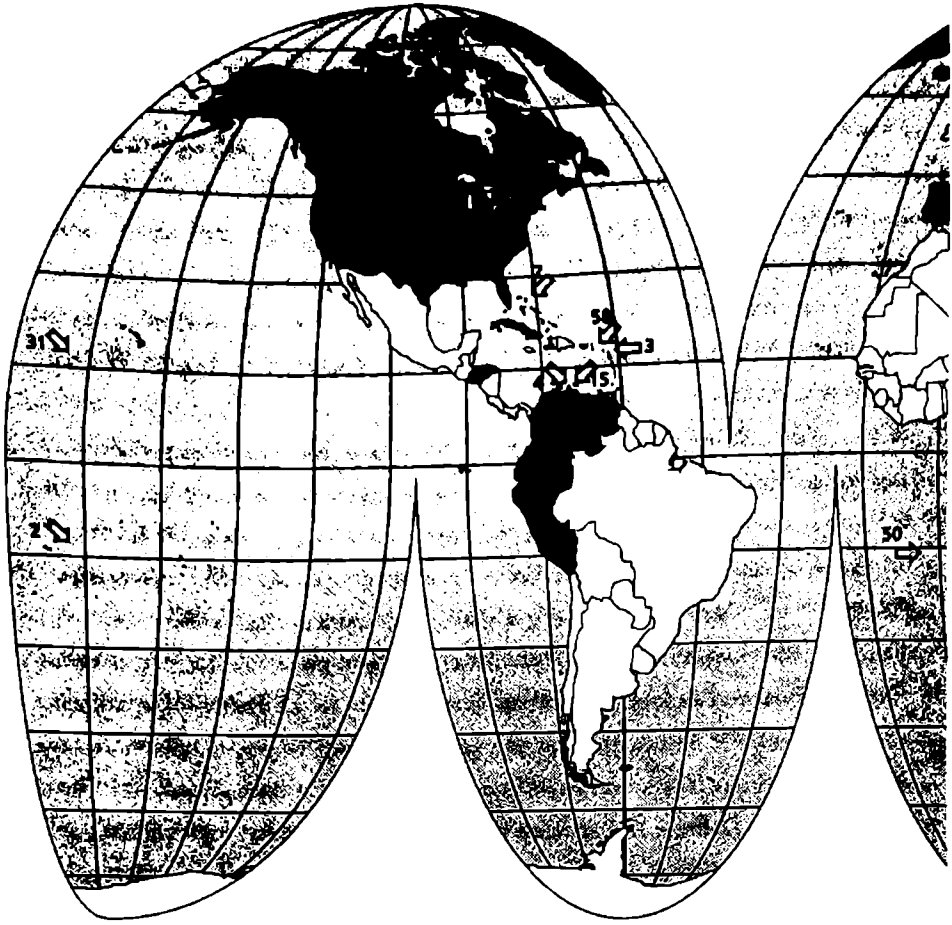
Although the Clinton administration was to insist more strongly than the Bush administration that preceded it on the need to diminish U.S. foreign military commitments, no attempt was made to decrease the U.S. "forward presence" abroad represented by its far-flung military bases. The main shift rather was to reduce the number of troops permanently stationed overseas by deploying troops more frequently but for shorter stays. As reported in the *Los Angeles Times*:

A 1999 Army War College study found, "While permanent overseas presence has decreased dramatically, operational deployments have increased exponentially."...In earlier times, members of the armed forces were routinely "stationed" overseas, usually for tours of several years and often accompanied by their families. Now they are "deployed," with the length of tour more uncertain and dependents almost never allowed. The deployments are both frequent and lengthy, however. On any given day before September 11, according to the Defense Department, more than 60,000 military personnel were conducting temporary operations and exercises in about 100 countries. While the mammoth European installations have been cut back, Defense Department records show that the new operational mode calls military personnel away from home about 135 days a year for the Army, 170 days for the Navy and 176 days for the Air Force. For the Army, each soldier now averages a deployment abroad once every 14 weeks.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to such frequent, periodic deployments, bases were to be used for pre-positioning equipment for purposes of rapid deployment. For example, the United States has pre-positioned a heavy brigade set of equipment in Kuwait, and has pre-positioned the equipment for a second heavy brigade along with a tank battalion set of equipment in Qatar.<sup>10</sup>

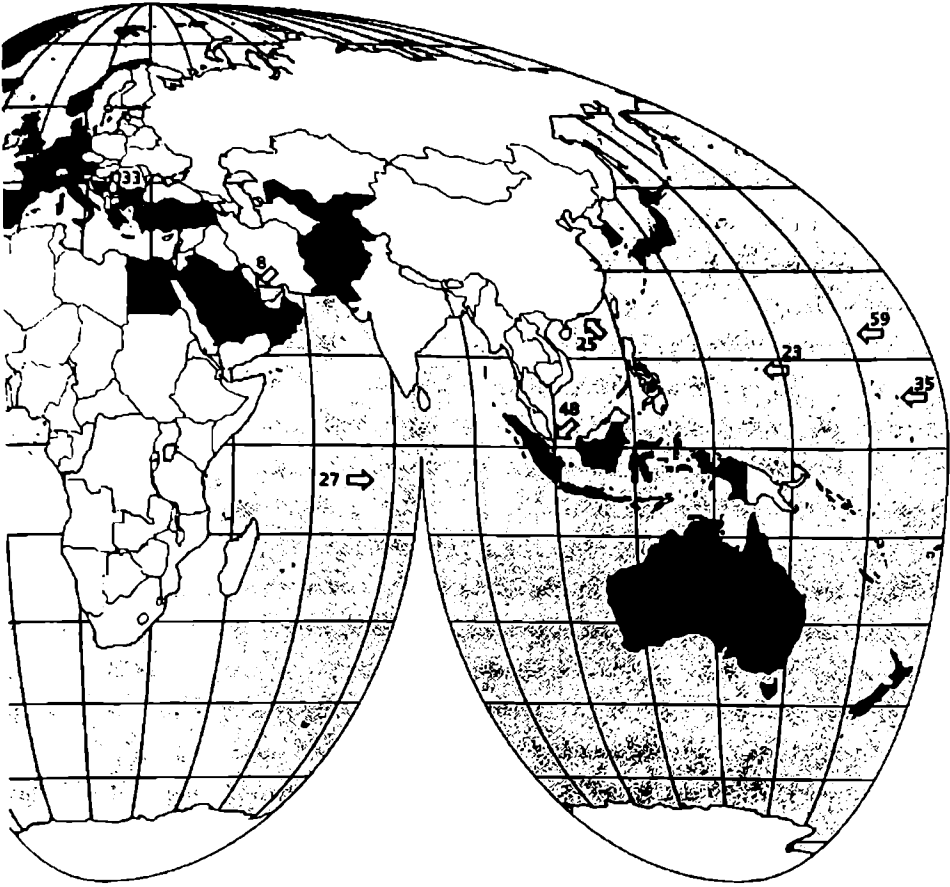
The 1990s closed with U.S. military intervention in the Balkans and extensive U.S. support for counterinsurgency operations in South America as part of "Plan Colombia." Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the onset of the "War on Terrorism," a rapid increase in the number and geographical spread of U.S. military bases commenced.

According to the Defense Department's *Base Structure Report, 2001*, the United States currently has overseas military installations in thirty-eight countries



*Countries and Separate Territories in Which U.S. Military Bases are Located  
(Includes U.S. Possessions)*

- |                   |                 |                                    |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Afghanistan    | 12. Canada      | 23. Guam                           |
| 2. American Samoa | 13. Colombia    | 24. Honduras                       |
| 3. Antigua        | 14. Cuba        | 25. Hong Kong                      |
| 4. Aruba          | 15. Curaçao     | 26. Iceland                        |
| 5. Australia      | 16. Denmark     | 27. Indian Ocean<br>(Diego Garcia) |
| 6. Austria        | 17. Ecuador     | 28. Indonesia                      |
| 7. Bahama Islands | 18. El Salvador | 29. Italy                          |
| 8. Bahrain        | 19. France      | 30. Japan                          |
| 9. Belgium        | 20. Germany     | 31. Johnston Atoll                 |
| 10. Bosnia        | 21. Greece      | 32. Korea                          |
| 11. Bulgaria      | 22. Greenland   |                                    |



- 
- |                     |                  |                    |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 33. Kosovo          | 42. Pakistan     | 51. Tajikistan     |
| 34. Kuwait          | 43. Peru         | 52. Turkey         |
| 35. Kwajalein Atoll | 44. Portugal     | 53. Egypt          |
| 36. Kyrgyzstan      | 45. Puerto Rico  | 54. United Kingdom |
| 37. Luxembourg      | 46. Qatar        | 55. United States  |
| 38. Netherlands     | 47. Saudi Arabia | 56. Uzbekistan     |
| 39. New Zealand     | 48. Singapore    | 57. Virgin Islands |
| 40. Norway          | 49. Spain        | 59. Wake Island    |
| 41. Oman            | 50. St. Helena   |                    |

Sources: U.S. Department of Defense, *Base Structure Report Fiscal Year 2001*; *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 6, 2002; *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 2001; John Lindsay-Poland, "U.S. Military Bases in Latin America and the Caribbean," *Foreign Policy in Focus* (October 2001) [foreignpolicyinfocus.org](http://foreignpolicyinfocus.org); Globemaster Links, *Baseline Directory*, "aviation Top 100" [www.globemaster.de/baselinks.html](http://www.globemaster.de/baselinks.html). Map by Claude Misukiewicz.

and separate territories. If military bases in U.S. territories and possessions outside the fifty states and the District of Columbia are added, it rises to forty-four. This number is extremely conservative, however, since it does not include important strategic forward bases, even some of those in which the United States maintains substantial numbers of troops, such as Saudi Arabia, Kosovo, and Bosnia. Nor does it include some of the most recently acquired U.S. bases. Through Plan Colombia—aimed principally at guerrilla forces in Colombia but also against the less than servile government of Venezuela and the massive popular movement opposing neoliberalism in Ecuador—the United States is now in the process of expanding its base presence in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Puerto Rico has replaced Panama as the hub for the region. Meanwhile the United States has been establishing four new military bases in Manta, Ecuador; Aruba; Curaçao; and Comalapa, El Salvador—all characterized as forward operating locations (FOLs). Since September 11, the United States has set up military bases housing sixty thousand troops in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, along with Kuwait, Qatar, Turkey, and Bulgaria. Also crucial in the operation is the major U.S. naval base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. All told, the United States now has overseas military bases in almost sixty countries and separate territories (see Map 1).<sup>11</sup>

In some ways this number may even be deceptively low. All issues of jurisdiction and authority with respect to bases in host countries are spelled out in what are called status of forces agreements. During the Cold War years these were normally public documents, but are now often classified as secret—for example, those with Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and in certain respects Saudi Arabia. According to Pentagon records, the United States now has formal agreements of this kind with ninety-three countries.<sup>12</sup>

Imperialism abhors a vacuum. Apart from the Balkans and the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia, which were previously within the Soviet sphere of influence or part of the Soviet Union itself, the forward bases that are now being acquired are in regions where the United States had experienced drastic reductions in its number of bases. In 1990, prior to the Gulf War, the United States had no bases in South Asia and only 10 percent as many in the Middle East/Africa as in 1947. In Latin America and the Caribbean the number of U.S. bases had declined by about two-thirds between 1947 and 1990. From a geopolitical/geomilitary standpoint, this was clearly a problem for a global economic and military hegemon such as the United States, even in the age of long-range cruise missiles.

The appearance of new bases in the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean since 1990 as a result of the Gulf War, the war in Afghanistan, and Plan Colombia therefore can be seen as a reassertion of direct U.S. military and imperial power in areas where this had to some extent eroded.

Military doctrine insists that the strategic significance of a foreign military base goes beyond the war in which it was acquired, and that planning for other potential missions using these new assets must begin almost immediately. For this reason the build-up of bases in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and three of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia is inevitably seen by Russia and China as constituting additional threats to their security. Russia has already indicated its displeasure at the prospect of permanent U.S. military bases in Central Asia. As for China, as the *Guardian* (London) noted on January 10, 2002, the base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan, where U.S. planes are landing daily, "is 250 miles from the western Chinese border. With U.S. bases to the east in Japan, to the south in South Korea, and Washington's military support for Taiwan, China may feel encircled."

The projection of U.S. military power into new regions through the establishment of U.S. military bases should not of course be seen simply in terms of direct military ends. They are always used to promote the economic and political objectives of U.S. capitalism. For example, U.S. corporations and the U.S. government have been eager for some time to build a secure corridor for U.S.-controlled oil and natural gas pipelines from the Caspian Sea in Central Asia through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Arabian Sea. The war in Afghanistan and the creation of U.S. bases in Central Asia are viewed as a key opportunity to make such pipelines a reality. The principal exponent of this policy has been Unocal corporation, as indicated by its testimony to the House Committee on International Relations in February 1998.<sup>13</sup> On December 31, 2001 President George W. Bush appointed Afghan-born Zalmay Khalilzad from the National Security Council to be special envoy to Afghanistan. Khalilzad is a former adviser for Unocal in connection with the proposed trans-Afghan pipeline and lobbied the U.S. government for a more sympathetic policy toward the Taliban regime. He changed his position only after the Clinton administration fired cruise missiles at targets in Afghanistan (aimed at Osama bin Laden) in 1998 (*Pravda*, January 9, 2002).

During the present war in Afghanistan, the U.S. media have generally been quiet about U.S. oil ambitions in the region. Nevertheless, an article in the business section of the *New York Times* (December 15, 2001) noted that, "The State Department is exploring the potential for post-Taliban energy projects in the

region, which has more than 6 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and almost 40 percent of its gas reserves." In an Op-Ed piece in the *New York Times* (January 18, 2002), Richard Butler, of the Council on Foreign Relations, acknowledged that, "The war in Afghanistan...has made the construction of a pipeline across Afghanistan and Pakistan politically possible for the first time since Unocal and the Argentinean company Bridas competed for the Afghan rights in the mid-1990s." Needless to say, without a strong U.S. military presence in the region, through the establishment of bases as a result of the war, the construction of such a pipeline would almost certainly have proven impracticable.

### *Blowback*

History teaches that foreign military bases are a double-edged sword. The most obvious indication of the truth of this proposition is the present "War on Terrorism." There can be little doubt that attacks over the last decade or more directed against both U.S. forces abroad and targets in the United States itself have been a response in large part to the growing U.S. role as a foreign military power in regions such as the Middle East, where the United States has not only engaged in military actions, even full-scale war, but also since 1990 has stationed thousands of troops. The establishment of U.S. bases in Saudi Arabia was regarded by some Saudis as an occupation of the holiest land of Islam, to be repelled at virtually any cost.

The perception of U.S. military bases as intrusions on national sovereignty is widespread in "host" countries for the simple reason that the presence of such bases inevitably translates into interference in domestic politics. As the 1970 report by the Subcommittee on Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee noted: "Overseas bases, the presence of elements of United States armed forces, joint planning, joint exercises, or excessive military assistance programs...all but guarantee some involvement by the United States in the internal affairs of the host government."<sup>14</sup> Such countries become more and more enmeshed in the U.S. empire.

U.S. overseas military bases thus frequently give rise to major social protests in the subject countries. Until the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1992, the U.S. bases in the Philippines were widely regarded in that nation as a legacy of U.S. colonialism. Like nearly all U.S. military bases overseas, they brought with them a host of social problems. The town of Olongapo next to the U.S. base at Subic Bay was

devoted entirely to “rest and recreation” for U.S. troops and housed more than fifty thousand prostitutes.

U.S. bases in Okinawa, which became the hub for the U.S. overseas basing system in the Pacific following the loss of the bases in the Philippines, exist at odds with the population. According to Chalmers Johnson, the island of Okinawa, a prefecture of Japan, “is essentially a military colony of the Pentagon’s, a huge safe house where Green Berets and the Defense Intelligence Agency, not to mention the air force and Marine Corps, can do things they would not dare do in the United States. It is used to project American power throughout Asia in the service of a de facto U.S. grand strategy to perpetuate or increase American hegemonic power in this crucial region.”<sup>15</sup>

In 1995, anti-base protests broke out in Okinawa in response to the rape of a twelve-year-old girl by three U.S. servicemen, who had rented a car for the purpose, so that they could take her to a remote location and rape her; and in response to the callous view of Admiral Richard C. Macke, commander of all U.S. forces in the Pacific, who told the press: “I think that [the rape] was absolutely stupid. For the price they paid to rent the car, they could have had a girl.” The widespread protests, led by an organization called Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence, were not, however, just in response to this single rape, brutal though it was. Between 1972 and 1995, U.S. servicemen were implicated in 4,716 crimes, nearly one per day, according to the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, a conservative Japanese newspaper. The Japan–U.S. agreement that governs the Okinawa base allows U.S. authorities to refuse Japanese requests for military suspects, and few indeed have suffered any inconvenience for their crimes.

The continuation, despite massive popular protests, of land bombing by the U.S. military in Vieques, Puerto Rico, where training is given for bombing runs later to be carried out in places like the Persian Gulf, is an indication of Puerto Rico’s continuing colonial status. Besides the land bombing range in Vieques, the Pentagon operates what is called an “outer range” of almost 200,000 square miles in waters near Puerto Rico, that encompasses an underwater tracking station for submarines and an electronic warfare range. These are used by the Navy and by various military contractors to test weapons systems.<sup>16</sup>

The current use of the Guantanamo naval base in Cuba to imprison and interrogate prisoners of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, under conditions that have generated global outrage and in the face of Cuban opposition to the war, is still another crude instance of U.S. assertion of imperial power through such bases.

*The Globalization of Power*

The United States, as we have seen, has built a chain of military bases and staging areas around the globe, as a means of deploying air and naval forces to be used on a moment's notice—all in the interest of maintaining its political and economic hegemony. These bases are not, as was the case for Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, simply integral parts of a colonial empire, but rather take on even greater importance, "in the absence of colonialism."<sup>17</sup> The United States, which has sought to maintain an imperial economic system without formal political controls over the territorial sovereignty of other nations, has employed these bases to exert force against those nations that have sought to break out of the imperial system altogether, or that have attempted to chart an independent course that is perceived as threatening U.S. interests. Without the worldwide dispersion of U.S. military forces in these bases, and without the U.S. predisposition to employ them in its military interventions, it would be impossible to keep many of the more dependent economic territories of the periphery from breaking away.

U.S. global political, economic, and financial power thus requires the periodic exercise of military power. The other advanced capitalist countries tied into this system have also become reliant on the United States as the main enforcer of the rules of the game. The positioning of U.S. military bases should therefore be judged not as a purely military phenomenon, but as a mapping out of the U.S.-dominated imperial sphere and of its spearheads within the periphery. What is clear at present and bears repeating is that such bases are now being acquired in areas where the United States had previously lost much of its "forward presence," such as in South Asia, the Middle East/Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, or in regions where U.S. bases have not existed previously, such as the Balkans and Central Asia. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the last remaining superpower is presently on a course of imperial expansion, as a means of promoting its political and economic interests. The present war on terrorism, which is in many ways an indirect product of the projection of U.S. power, is now being used to justify the further projection of that power.

For those who choose to oppose these developments there should be no illusion. The global expansion of military power on the part of the hegemonic state of world capitalism is an integral part of economic globalization. To say no to this form of military expansionism is to say no at the same time to capitalist globalization and imperialism and hence to capitalism itself.



## The Rediscovery of Imperialism

November 2002

The concept of “imperialism” was considered outside the acceptable range of political discourse within the ruling circles of the capitalist world for most of the twentieth century. Reference to “imperialism” during the Vietnam War, no matter how realistic, was almost always a sign that the writer was on the left side of the political spectrum. In his *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present*, Harry Magdoff noted, “As a rule, polite academic scholars prefer not to use the term ‘imperialism.’ They find it distasteful and unscientific.”<sup>1</sup>

Today this is suddenly no longer true. U.S. intellectuals and the political elite are warmly embracing an openly “imperialist” or “ne imperialism” mission for the United States, repeatedly enunciated in such prestigious print media as the *New York Times* and *Foreign Affairs*. This imperialism fervor owes much to the Bush administration’s War on Terrorism, which is taking the form of the conquest and occupation of Afghanistan and—if its ambitions are fulfilled—also Iraq. According to the Bush administration’s *National Security Strategy*, there are no recognized limits or boundaries to the use of military power to promote the interests of the United States. In the face of this attempt to extend what can only be called the U.S. Empire, intellectuals and political figures are not only returning to the idea of imperialism, but also to the view of it propounded by its earlier nineteenth century proponents as constituting a grand civilizing mission. Comparisons of the United States to Imperial Rome and Imperial Britain are now

common within the mainstream press. All that is needed to make it completely serviceable is to rid the concept of its old Marxist associations of economic hierarchy and exploitation—not to mention racism.

According to Michael Ignatieff, writing in the *New York Times Magazine*, “[I]mperialism used to be the white man’s burden. This gave it a bad reputation. But imperialism doesn’t stop being necessary because it is politically incorrect.” In referring to U.S. war operations in Afghanistan he writes:

...the Special Forces aren’t social workers. They are an imperial detachment, advancing American power and interests in Central Asia. Call it peacekeeping or nation-building, call it what you like, imperial policing is what is going on in Mazar. In fact, America’s entire war on terror is an exercise in imperialism. This may come as a shock to Americans, who don’t like to think of their country as an empire. But what else can you call America’s legions of soldiers, spooks and Special Forces straddling the globe?<sup>2</sup>

G. John Ikenberry, Professor of Geopolitics and Global Justice at Georgetown University and a regular contributor to the Council on Foreign Relations publication, *Foreign Affairs*, writes:

In the shadows of the Bush administration’s war on terrorism, sweeping new ideas are circulating about U.S. grand strategy and the restructuring of today’s unipolar world. They call for American unilateral and preemptive, even preventative, use of force, facilitated if possible by coalitions of the willing—but ultimately unconstrained by the rules and norms of the international community. At the extreme, these notions form a neoimperial vision in which the United States arrogates to itself the global role of setting standards, determining threats, using force, and meting out justice.<sup>3</sup>

For Ikenberry, this is not meant as a criticism: “America’s imperial goals and modus operandi,” he tells us, “are much more limited and benign than were those of age-old emperors.”

Other influential mainstream political and intellectual figures are no less fashionably forthright in their support for neoimperialism. Sebastian Mallaby, a *Washington Post* columnist and self-styled “reluctant imperialist,” writing in *Foreign Affairs*, explains that “the logic of neo-imperialism is too compelling for

the Bush administration to resist." Max Boot, a *Wall Street Journal* columnist, observes in "The Case for American Empire:" "America now faces the prospect of military action in many of the same lands where generations of British colonial soldiers went on campaigns. These are all places where Western armies had to quell disorder. Afghanistan and other troubled foreign lands cry out for the sort of enlightened foreign administration once provided by self-confident Englishmen in jodhpurs and pith helmets." *Atlantic Monthly* essayist Robert Kaplan's latest book, *Warrior Politics*, argues for a U.S. crusade "to bring prosperity to distant parts of the world under America's soft imperial influence." President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski contends that the main task of the United States in the preservation of its empire is "to prevent collusion and maintain dependence among the vassals, keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together." Stephen Peter Rosen, head of the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, has written in the *Harvard Review* (May-June 2002): "Our goal [that of the American military] is not combating a rival, but maintaining our imperial position, and maintaining imperial order." Henry Kissinger opens his *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?* with the words "[T]he U.S. is enjoying a preeminence unrivaled by even the greatest empires in the past."<sup>4</sup>

There are rules, however, to this re-engagement with the concepts of "empire" and "imperialism" within establishment discourse. The uniquely benevolent moves of the United States must be emphasized. Proponents of the new imperialism must carefully confine themselves to the military and political concepts of empire and imperialism (avoiding any sense of economic imperialism). And they must eschew all radical notions that connect imperialism to capitalism and exploitation.

### *The Economic Basis of Imperialism*

The birthplace of the notion of economic imperialism, as opposed to imperialism more generally, was the United States a little more than a century ago. In his essay, "The Economic Basis of Imperialism," first published in the *North American Review* in 1898, at the time of the Spanish-American War, Charles A. Conant argued that imperialism was necessary to absorb surplus capital in the face of a shortage of profitable investment outlets—in other words, to relieve what he called the problem of "congested capital." For Conant,

Whether the United States shall actually acquire territorial possessions, shall set-up captain-generalships and garrisons, whether they shall adopt the middle ground of protecting sovereignties nominally independent, or whether they shall content themselves with naval stations and diplomatic representatives as the basis for their rights to the free commerce of the East, is a matter of detail. . . . The writer is not an advocate of "imperialism" from sentiment, but does not fear the name if it means only that the United States shall assert their right to free markets in all the old countries which are being opened up to the surplus resources of the capitalist countries and thereby given the benefits of modern civilization. Whether this policy carries with it the direct government of groups of half-savage islands may be a subject for argument, but upon the economic side of the question there is but one choice—either to enter by some means upon the competition for the employment of American capital and enterprise in these countries, or to continue the needless duplication of existing means of production and communication, with the glut of unconsumed products, the convulsions followed by trade stagnation, and the steadily declining return upon investments which a negative policy will invoke.<sup>5</sup>

Conflict among the great powers at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, over the partition of Africa, the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the Spanish-American War, the South African (Boer) War, and the Russo-Japanese War, signaled the rise of a new imperialism, associated with monopoly capitalism, that was qualitatively different from the colonialism that had preceded it. This led to an economic theory of imperialism on the part of the proponents of imperialism—who no longer viewed it as mere "sentiment," as emphasized in Conant's analysis. The changes in imperialism also soon gave rise to a more thoroughgoing critical analysis beginning with John A. Hobson's classic *Imperialism: A Study*, first published in 1902. Hobson was a leading British critic of the Boer War and out of this developed his critique of imperialism. In a famous chapter of his book entitled "The Economic Taproot of Imperialism" Hobson observed:

Every improvement of methods of production, every concentration of ownership and control, seems to accentuate the tendency [to imperialist expansion]. As one nation after another enters the machine economy and adopts advanced industrial methods, it becomes more difficult for its manufacturers, merchants, and financiers to dispose profitably of their economic resources. . . . Everywhere appear excessive

powers of production, excessive capital in search of investment. It is admitted by all business men that the growth of the powers of production in their country exceeds the growth in consumption, that more goods can be produced than can be sold at a profit, and that more capital exists than can find remunerative investment. It is this economic condition of affairs that forms the taproot of Imperialism.<sup>6</sup>

Hobson's work was not socialist. He believed that imperialism was due to the dominance of certain concentrated economic and financial interests and that radical reforms that dealt with maldistribution of income and the needs of the domestic economy could bring to an end the imperialist impulse. Yet his work was to take on a much larger significance through the influence it exercised on Marxist analyses of imperialism, which were emerging at this time. The most important of these was Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, first published in 1916. The main purpose of Lenin's analysis was to explain the interimperialist rivalry among the great powers that had led to the First World War. But in the process of developing his analysis Lenin linked imperialism to monopoly capitalism, arguing that in its "briefest possible definition ... imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism."<sup>7</sup> He explored in that context a set of economic factors that went well beyond maldistribution of income or the profit-seeking goals of particular monopolistic corporations. Monopoly capitalism was seen as a new stage, beyond competitive capitalism, in which finance capital, an alliance between large firms and banking capital, dominated the economy and the state. Competition was not eliminated but it continued mainly among a relatively small number of giant firms who were able to control large parts of the national and international economy. Monopoly capitalism, in this sense, was inseparable from interimperialist rivalry, manifested primarily in the form of a struggle for global markets. The resulting division of the world into imperial spheres and the struggle that this entailed led directly to the First World War. Lenin's more complex perspective on imperialism went beyond an argument that focused simply on the necessity of finding investment outlets for surplus capital. He also placed emphasis on the impetus to gain exclusive control of raw materials and tighter control of foreign markets that arose out of the globalizing conditions of the monopoly stage of capitalism.

Later Marxist (and radical, non-Marxist) analyses were to focus more than Lenin himself had on some of the more general features of imperialism, characteristic of capitalism in all of its stages, such as the division between center and

periphery, an issue that had been broached by Marx. But Lenin's sense of a new, more developed, form of imperialism, associated with the concentration and centralization of capital and the birth of the monopoly stage, has retained much of its significance in our age—characterized by monopoly capitalism at an advanced phase of globalization. Indeed, it was the very success of Marxist theories of imperialism, uncovering capitalism's systematic exploitation of the periphery and the conditions of interimperialist rivalry in great detail—so that the emperor was seen in all of his nakedness—that resulted in the term “imperialism” becoming beyond the pale within mainstream discourse. As long as the Soviet Union existed and a strong tide of anti-imperialist revolutions was evident in the periphery, there was no possibility of capitalism openly embracing the concept of imperialism in the name of the promotion of civilization. U.S. military interventions throughout the third world to combat revolutions or to gain control of markets were invariably accounted for within official discourse in the United States in terms of Cold War motives, not in terms of imperial ends.

### *The Age of Imperialism*

Harry Magdoff's *The Age of Imperialism*, published in 1969, had the distinction of being the most influential direct attempt to counter the dominant view of U.S. foreign policy during the Vietnam War period through an empirical treatment of the economics of U.S. imperialism.

Magdoff's work could not be effectively dismissed as mere ideology, because it aimed at stripping away the clothing of U.S. imperialism by looking at its economic structure in the most straightforward manner possible—using U.S. economic statistics. It therefore drew considerable fire from the establishment as well as giving inspiration to many of those protesting against the war.

*The Age of Imperialism* represented the return to prominence of the critique of imperialism within the U.S. left. Addressing what was widely viewed as an anomaly in the U.S. relation to the rest of the world, arising from the existence of an interventionist foreign policy accompanied by a seemingly “isolationist economy,” Magdoff demonstrated that the U.S. economy was in fact anything but isolationist. In this connection, Magdoff provided data showing that earnings on foreign investments had more than doubled between 1950 and 1964 rising from about 10 percent of all after-tax profits for U.S. domestic nonfinancial corporations.<sup>8</sup>

This work was also notable for its arguments on the international financial expansion of U.S. capital, based on the dollar's hegemonic position in the world economy and on the growth of a debt trap in the third world. It was here that Magdoff provided his first explanation of the "reverse flow process" inherent in the continuous reliance on foreign debt. "If a country borrows, say, a \$1000 a year," he wrote, "before long the service payments on the debt will be larger than the inflow of money each year." Assuming the simple case of an annual loan of \$1000 at 5 percent interest "to be repaid in equal installments over 20 years," it follows that in the fifth year almost fifty percent of the annual loan will go to servicing the debt; in the tenth year approximately ninety percent of the new loan money will be devoted to debt service; in the fifteenth year, the outflow for interest and amortization will be greater than the capital inflow; and in the twentieth year "the borrower is paying out more than \$1.50 on past debt for every \$1.00 of new money he borrows."<sup>9</sup>

Would it not be possible, Magdoff asked, for a country to avoid this trap by not borrowing year after year, but instead using the borrowed money to develop industry to provide the revenue to dispense with borrowing and even pay off the debt? A large part of the answer was to be found in the reality that since the repayment has to occur in the currency of the creditor nation, the debt could only be repaid (irrespective of the rate of growth) if there were enough exports to provide the needed foreign exchange. Even as early as 1969, long before the third world debt problem was deemed critical, Magdoff observed that "the growth in service payments on the debt of the underdeveloped world has increased much more rapidly than has the growth in its exports. Hence the burden of debt has become more oppressive and the financial dependency on the leading industrial nations and their international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund has increased accordingly."<sup>10</sup>

Most of the essays in Magdoff's 1978 book, *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present* dealt with misconceptions about the history of imperialism. Of chief importance in this respect was Magdoff's response to the question: "Is Imperialism Necessary?" In answer to the common contention that capitalism and imperialism were completely separate categories, and that the latter was not necessarily an attribute of the former, he argued that capitalism had been from the start a world system and that imperialist expansion in the broad sense was just as much a part of the system as the search for profits itself. He also argued against those on the left who sought to generate an analysis of modern imperialism

through a particular theory of economic crisis or the necessity of the export of capital, rather than recognizing that imperialism was intrinsic to capitalism's globalizing tendencies from the very start. Despite the importance of economic laws of motion of capitalism in generating the reality of modern imperialism, any simple, mechanical, narrowly economic explanation (separated off from political, military, and cultural factors) was to be avoided. Rather the ultimate sources were to be found in the historical development of capitalism since the sixteenth century. "The elimination of imperialism," Magdoff concluded, "requires the overthrow of capitalism."<sup>11</sup>

### *Policing the Concept of Imperialism*

The mainstream responded to these and related arguments by placing the term "imperialism" (insofar as it was linked to capitalism) more and more outside the realm of acceptable discourse—characterizing it as a purely ideological term. At the same time there were attempts to isolate the concept of "economic imperialism" specifically, by disassociating it, in the narrow, compartmentalizing method of mainstream social science, from political imperialism, cultural imperialism, etc., and setting it up for special criticism.<sup>12</sup> This attack on Marxist and radical approaches to imperialism succeeded so effectively that by 1990 Prabhat Patnaik wrote an article for *Monthly Review* entitled "Whatever Happened to Imperialism?," in which he raised the question of the almost complete disappearance of the term from left analysis in the United States and Europe. It was particularly astonishing that this had occurred in the face of U.S. military interventions (both overt and covert) in countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Grenada, and Panama and despite the rapacious role of multinational corporations around the world (for example in India, where Union Carbide killed thousands).<sup>13</sup>

"Younger Marxists," Patnaik wrote, "look bemused when the term is mentioned. Burning issues of the day ... are discussed but without any reference to imperialism. ... The topic has virtually disappeared from the pages of Marxist journals, especially those of a later vintage."<sup>14</sup> The history and theory of imperialism, he noted, is no longer discussed.

The historical significance of this can be seen in an ideological split that occurred in response to the struggle over globalization and the new Balkan Wars, and later in relation to the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and



the Pentagon and the subsequent War on Terrorism. On the one hand, mainstream intellectuals, particularly in the face of the widening military operations of the United States and NATO but also in response to such issues as U.S. support of the World Trade Organization, became more willing to reappropriate the concept of imperialism as a way of putting a larger gloss on what was presented as the beneficial hegemony or “soft imperialism” of the world’s only superpower. On the other hand, post-Marxist and erstwhile radical thinkers often took on the role of criticizing any use of the concept of imperialism in its classical Marxist sense, detaching it from capitalism, global exploitation, and economic imperialism, and arguing that since the term was unacceptable in polite discourse it should be discarded.

An example of the latter is an article by Tom Barry, entitled “A Return to Interventionism,” appearing online in *Foreign Policy in Focus* on March 11, 2002, ostensibly responding to the September 11 attacks and the War on Terrorism. Barry, who in his earlier writings in the 1970s had not hesitated to embrace the concept of imperialism, argued in “A Return to Interventionism” that:

For some, especially in the new and old Left this [the Vietnam era] was the “Age of Imperialism,” an era when the U.S. was securing its hold on the resources and the states of the “developing” world. There were analytical weaknesses with this anti-imperialism critique, mainly because it didn’t explain well why the U.S. was so deeply involved in places of seemingly so little economic consequence, such as South Vietnam. Nor was the imperial America critique helpful in explaining the idealist side of America’s interventionism—the Wilsonian compulsion to bring freedom and democracy to the rest of the world. If the aim was to reform U.S. foreign policy, criticizing the U.S. as a runaway imperial power just didn’t fly, either with U.S. policy makers or the public. What did seem to work as a way to filter out the tendencies in U.S. foreign policy that supported repression and military intervention in the third world was the human rights critique.

In this view, the fact that “U.S. policy makers,” that is, the representatives of the dominant system of power, were not drawn to the concept of imperialism (plus the fact that an indoctrinated population saw the term as having no relation to U.S. history) was reason enough to dismiss the concept altogether. After all did not the United States primarily seek, except for a few lapses here and there, to “bring freedom and democracy to the rest of the world”? Yet, at the very

time that this article appeared, the U.S. military was engaged in war operations in Afghanistan, building bases throughout Central Asia, and launching interventions in the Philippines and elsewhere. At the same moment that the notion of the “Age of Imperialism” was being criticized on the U.S. left, mainstream pundits and political figures were extolling a new age of imperialism led by the United States.

A more influential left criticism of the notion of imperialism was launched by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their book *Empire*. According to Hardt and Negri imperialism ended with the Vietnam War. The 1991 Gulf War, in which the United States unleashed its military power on Iraq, was, according to these authors, carried out “*not as a function of [the United States’] own national motives but in the name of global right. . . . The U.S. world police acts not in imperialist interest but in imperial interest [that is in the interest of Empire without a center and without boundaries]. In this sense the Gulf War did indeed, as George Bush [senior] claimed, announce the birth of a new world order.*” Elsewhere in their book they declared: “*The United States does not, and indeed no nation-state can today, form the center of an imperialist project.*”<sup>15</sup>

It was precisely this position—that denied a relationship between the United States and imperialism in the classical, exploitative sense, but which also saw the extension of U.S. sovereignty and power as reflective of “empire” and a civilizing “imperial” role (the extension of the U.S. Constitution to the global stage)—that was emphasized in the unstinting praise of Hardt and Negri’s book that poured out in such places as the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, the *London Observer*, and *Foreign Affairs*.

More recently, Todd Gitlin, a former president of the Students for a Democratic Society and now Professor of Journalism and Sociology at Columbia, wrote in the *New York Times*:

The American left...had its version of unilateralism. Responsibility for the [September 11] attacks had, somehow, to lie with American imperialism, because all responsibility has to lie with American imperialism—a perfect echo of the right’s idea that all good powers are and should be somehow American. Intellectuals and activists on the far left could not be troubled much with compassion or defense. . . . Knowing little about Al Qaeda, they filed it under Anti-Imperialism, and American attacks on the Taliban under Vietnam Quagmire. For them, not flying the flag became an urgent cause. . . . Post-Vietnam liberals have an opening now,

freed of our 60's flag anxiety and our reflexive negativity, to embrace a liberal patriotism that is unapologetic and uncowed.<sup>16</sup>

For Gitlin—writing in an establishment media outlet that had been publishing pieces straightforwardly extolling a supposedly benign American “imperialism”—the whole charge of “American imperialism” was some sort of extreme distortion introduced by the left. Never mind that it was the location of U.S. military bases permanently in Saudi Arabia as a result of the U.S. war against Iraq in 1991 that induced the Islamic fundamentalists coming out of Saudi Arabia (including Al Qaeda itself) to turn on the United States. Never mind that Osama bin Laden got his terrorist training through the U.S.-sponsored war of Islamic fundamentalists against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Never mind that Saddam Hussein was a former U.S. imperial client at the time of the Iraq-Iran War (and indeed up to the very moment of his invasion of Kuwait). And never mind that Saudi Arabia and Iraq are first and second in the world in their known oil reserves, or the fact that Afghanistan is the doorstep to Central Asia, one of the richest areas of petroleum and natural gas reserves in the world. Finally, never mind that the United States now has military bases throughout Central Asia and intends to stay. Somehow, despite all of this and despite the fact that America’s “supposed imperialism” is now being praised widely within the mainstream, the left is not allowed to raise the issue of American imperialism as part of a critique of U.S. foreign policy. If imperialism is being rediscovered it is only within certain circumscribed ideological limits.

*The Global Rich Get Richer, the Global Poor Get Poorer*<sup>17</sup>

An essential aspect of the rediscovery of imperialism within the mainstream is to justify U.S. military and political dominance while removing this from any notion of a rising gap between rich and poor nations—of the kind emphasized in Marxist theories of imperialism and highlighted by the new antiglobalization/anticapitalist movement. A sign of the impact of this new global anticapitalist movement is the extent to which the global establishment and its allies have found it necessary to defend their record. A large part of this defense is the claim that the antiglobalizers don’t know what they are talking about. If the American imperium is seemingly more dominant than ever it has nothing to do, we are told, with economic exploitation.

A case in point is an August 15, 2002 article in the *New York Times* by Virginia Postrel, one of its stable of economic columnists. Given the catchy heading, “The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Poorer. Right? Let’s Take Another Look,” this article was timed to appear just prior to the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in August and September 2002. The object of Postrel’s article was to refute Noam Chomsky, who was quoted as saying, “Inequality is soaring through the globalizing period—within countries and across countries.” According to Postrel, not only was Chomsky dead wrong, so was the 1999 United Nations *Human Development Report* that reached the same conclusion based on U.N. organized data.

What is wrong with the claims of Chomsky and the United Nations, according to Postrel and other defenders of globalization and liberalization? The data, they insist, are flawed. “The United Nations report and others looked at gaps in income of the richest and poorest countries—not rich and poor individuals. That means that formerly poor citizens of giant countries could become a lot richer and still barely show up in the data.”

Here the neoliberal defenders of the global system intermingle and confuse two *separate* questions—the gaps between countries and the unequal distribution in the income of the world’s population. There is indeed a legitimate difference between the two. Country size is irrelevant in examining the gaps between countries. The world economy works through different states. The history of capitalism is distinguished by a growing gap between rich and poor states—a gap distinguished by the fact that the rich states grow in large part by exploiting other nations. Sometimes, it is a large state exploiting a group of smaller states. In other cases, it is a small state extracting the surplus of much larger states. Think of the present U.S. Empire and the former British Empire.

The ideologists of global capitalism, dedicated to demonstrating the benign character of American imperialism, insist that globalization and liberalization will lead to economic equality among nations, big and small. The facts shown by the United Nations, however, prove conclusively that this did not happen. On the contrary, the gap between states has widened.

Still the *New York Times* is not interested. It cares about the people. Postrel writes:

Over the last three decades . . . the world’s two largest countries, China and India, have raced ahead economically. So have other Asian countries with relatively large

populations. The result is that 2.5 billion people have seen their standards of living rise toward those of the billion people in the already developed countries—decreasing global poverty and increasing global equality. From the point of view of individuals, economic liberalization has been a huge success.

But what examples! Let us look at India's contribution to the decrease in global poverty. According to the latest World Bank report, *86 percent of India's population lives on less than \$2 a day.*<sup>18</sup> In 1983, the top 10 percent of income earners in India accounted for 26.7 percent of household income/expenditures, by 1992, their share was 28.4 percent, and by 1997, it had risen to 33.5 percent. Hardly a sign of increasing equality!<sup>19</sup>

Now, consider the example of China. Three decades ago China was the most equal nation in the world. Then the political leaders took another road in pursuing their goals. Instead of the earlier priority of equality, the citizens were told that it was good to get rich. Private enterprise was encouraged, the door to foreign investment was widened, the Chinese state became cozy with U.S. multinationals, globalization was welcomed, the World Bank entered, and China recently became a member of the WTO.

The result was exactly the opposite to what the prevailing dogma would lead one to expect, and that Postrel and other defenders of neoliberal globalization simply assume to be true. China, once distinguished by its devotion to equality became increasingly unequal. So much so that by the end of the nineties, China's distribution of income closely resembled the maldistribution of income in the United States (see Table 1).

**Table 5-1:**  
**Distribution of Income in the U.S. and China**

	Percentage Share of Income or Consumption <sup>20</sup>			
	Lowest 10%	Lowest 20%	Highest 10%	Highest 20%
CHINA	2.4	5.9	30.4	46.6
U.S.	1.8	5.2	30.3	46.4

<sup>20</sup>Depending on the data, World Bank economists will calculate the distribution of income by either revenue or consumption.

Source: World Bank, *World Development Report 2000/2001*, U.S. data are for 1997; China for 1998.

There exists, in fact, a solid set of data on the worldwide distribution of income. The information was developed through an exhaustive and highly competent study made by Branko Milanovic, an economist at the World Bank. He burrowed into the incredible amount of statistical data buried in the World Bank's computers. His study came up with the story on the distribution of the world's income in 1988 and 1993. It demonstrates that, in fact, inequality increased during those years (see Table 2).

**Table 5-2: World Income Distribution:  
Cumulative Percentage of Population and Income**

Cumulative percent of world population	Cumulative percent of world income	
	1988	1993
Bottom 10%	0.9	0.8
Bottom 20%	2.3	2.0
Bottom 50%	9.6	8.5
Bottom 75%	25.9	22.3
Bottom 85%	41.0	37.1
Top 10%	46.9	50.8
Top 5%	31.2	33.7
Top 1%	9.3	9.5

Source: Branko Milanovic (World Bank, Development Research Group), "True World Income Distribution, 1988 and 1993: First Calculation Based on Household Surveys Alone." *The Economic Journal*, 112 (January 2002), pp. 51-92.

Note that the top 1 percent received a larger share (9.5 percent) of the world's income in 1993 than the bottom 50 percent, while the top 5 percent in 1993 had an income share far exceeding that of the bottom 75 percent and beginning to approach that of the bottom 85 percent. (Milanovic explored the data in greater detail than shown here and concluded that the top 1 percent had the same income as the bottom 57 percent of the people on this earth.) These figures are exactly what one would expect from the whole history of capitalism, which prospers through widening the gap between rich and poor—a law of the system that now has a global field of operation. Such global exploitation is the core of imperialism.

which is as basic to capitalism, and as inseparable, as accumulation itself. But this of course is not the whole of imperialism, which represents a complex history with political, military, and cultural (racial) factors tied into it. In the Marxist approach, economic imperialism is not really separate from these other features, which are equally a part of global capitalist development. Just as the search for profits is the mantra of the American imperium, so is its military and political power aimed at extending this search and expanding its sway on a world basis—all the time placing first and foremost the interests of U.S. corporations and the U.S. state.

The rediscovery of imperialism within the mainstream only means that these processes are now being presented, especially by ruling circles in the United States, as inevitable—a reality from which there is no escape. The revolt against this new phase of imperialism, however, has clearly only just begun. Most of the population of the world knows what U.S. pundits conveniently forget, that U.S. imperialism resembles the exploitative empires of the past, and will likely suffer the same fate as past empires—growing revolt from within and “barbarians” at the gates.





## U.S. Imperial Ambitions and Iraq

*December 2002*

Officially Washington's current policy toward Iraq is to bring about a "regime change"—either through a military coup, or by means of a U.S. invasion, justified as a "preemptive attack" against a rogue state bent on developing and deploying weapons of mass destruction.<sup>1</sup> But a U.S. invasion, should it take place, would not confine its objectives to mere regime change in Baghdad. The larger goal would be nothing less than the global projection of U.S. power through assertion of American dominance over the entire Middle East. What the world is now facing therefore is the prospect of a major new development in the history of imperialism.

The imperialism of today is definitely not the same as that of the late nineteenth century. In the early days of the modern era of imperialism, several powers—notably Germany, Japan, and the United States—came on the scene to challenge Britain's hegemony in various parts of the globe. There were a number of notable features of imperialism during this period: the scramble among the European powers to divide up Africa; heightened competition in Europe for each other's markets; the growing German challenge to London as the core of the international money market. At the same time, the United States was attempting to enter the competition for markets in Europe and was developing its own colonies and spheres of influence in Latin America and Asia. The primary causes of the First World War included both the bitter competition among the great powers for colonies and markets and the German attempt to eliminate Britain as the center of international money and commodity markets.

The period after the First World War represented a second phase of modern imperialism. The Treaty of Versailles was a process of the winners dividing the gains, with a unitary goal—the defeat of Bolshevism. Thorstein Veblen wrote that wiping Bolshevism off the map was not simply a secret clause in the Treaty of Versailles, it was the very “parchment” of the Treaty.<sup>2</sup> However, the plan to isolate and bring down the Soviet Union was interrupted by the Great Depression and by the Second World War, which developed out of the struggles of the axis powers, Germany, Italy, and Japan, to carve out larger spaces within the world system.

A third phase of imperialism emerged after World War II. During the war, the United States, as the new hegemonic state within the capitalist world, had developed a plan for gaining control of what it considered to be the strategic centers of the world economy—an ambition that was then only limited by the existence of the Soviet sphere of influence. Writing in this space in November 1981, Noam Chomsky described the formation of U.S. geopolitical strategy in this period as follows:

The general framework of thinking within which American foreign policy has evolved since the Second World War is best described in the planning documents produced during that war by the State Department planners and the Council for Foreign Relations who met for a six-year period in the War and Peace Studies Program, 1939–45. They knew, certainly by 1941–42, that the war was going to end with the United States in a position of enormous global dominance. The question arose: “How do we organize the world?”

They drew up a concept known as Grand Area Planning, where the Grand Area is defined as the area which, in their terms, was “strategically necessary for world control.” The geopolitical analysis behind it attempted to work out which areas of the world have to be “open”—open to investment, open to the repatriation of profits. Open, that is, to domination by the United States.

In order for the United States economy to prosper without internal changes (a crucial point which comes through in all of the discussions in this period), without any redistribution of income or power or modification of structures, the War and Peace Program determined that the minimum area strategically necessary for world control included the entire Western hemisphere, the former British empire which they were in the process of dismantling, and the Far East. That was the minimum, and the maximum was the universe.

Somewhere between the two came the concept of the Grand Area—and the task of how to organize it in terms of financial institutions and planning. This is the framework that remained constant throughout the postwar period.<sup>3</sup>

The liberation of Europe's colonies and the defeat of Japan's ambitions in the Pacific allowed U.S. capital, backed up by U.S. military power, to begin to penetrate markets that were previously inaccessible. While the Bretton Woods Agreement provided a new economic framework for the imperialist powers, U.S. military might and covert operations were projected around the globe with increasing frequency—wars in Korea and Vietnam, the overthrow of governments in Iran, Guatemala, and Chile, the attempted overthrow of the Cuban government, and interference in numerous civil wars in Central America and Africa.

Crucial to the whole conception of the Grand Area was control of the Middle East, which was regarded as part of the old British Empire, and absolutely essential for the economic, military, and political control of the globe—not least of all because it was the repository of most of the world's proven oil reserves. The United States thus began a long series of overt and covert interventions in the region in the 1950s, the foremost of which was the 1953 overthrow of the democratically elected Mossadegh government in Iran, which had nationalized foreign-owned oil companies. The success of the U.S. drive was clear. Between 1940 and 1967, U.S. companies increased their control of Middle Eastern oil reserves from 10 percent to close to 60 percent while reserves under British control decreased from 72 percent in 1940 to 30 percent in 1967.<sup>4</sup>

The long delayed meaningful integration of Western Europe, partially caused by the effects of economic stagnation, meant that it was not able to become the bulwark against U.S. interests that European leaders had hoped. With a weak Europe and Japan unable to mount a serious challenge to U.S. interests in Asia, the defeat of actually existing socialism in Europe by the early 1990s paved the way for a renewed period of U.S. hegemony, which had partly faded in the 1970s and 1980s.

Viewed from the standpoint of the historical evolution of imperialism, it is clear that the real motive behind Washington's current drive to start a war with Iraq is not any genuine military threat from that country, but rather the goal of demonstrating that the U.S. is now prepared to use its power at will. As Jay Bookman, deputy editorial page editor of the *Atlanta-Journal Constitution* observed:

The official story on Iraq has never made sense. . . . It [the threatened invasion of Iraq] is not about weapons of mass destruction, or terrorism, or Saddam, or UN resolutions. This war, should it come, is intended to mark the official emergence of the United States as a full-fledged global empire, seizing sole responsibility and authority as planetary policeman. It would be the culmination of a plan 10 years or more in the making, carried out by those who believe that the United States must seize the opportunity for global domination, even if it means becoming the "American imperialists" that our enemies always claimed we were . . . Rome did not stoop to containment; it conquered. And so should we.<sup>5</sup>

### *The Defense of Empire*

Wars of imperial expansion, however unjustifiable they may be, always demand some kind of justification. Often this has been accomplished through the doctrine of defensive war. In his 1919 essay, "The Sociology of Imperialisms," Joseph Schumpeter wrote of Rome during its years of greatest expansion:

There was no corner of the known world where some interest was not alleged to be in danger or under actual attack. If the interests were not Roman, they were those of Rome's allies; and if Rome had no allies, then allies would be invented. When it was utterly impossible to contrive such an interest—why, then it was the national honor that had been insulted. The fight was always invested with an aura of legality. Rome was always being attacked by evil-minded neighbors, always fighting for a breathing-space. The whole world was pervaded by a host of enemies, and it was manifestly Rome's duty to guard against their indubitably aggressive designs.<sup>6</sup>

The pretense that an endless series of defensive wars was needed to check evil-minded forces bent on aggression in every corner of the known world did not die with the Roman Empire, but was part of the rationale for the expansion of British imperialism in the nineteenth century and American imperialism in the twentieth.<sup>7</sup> This same mentality pervades the new *National Security Strategy of the United States*, recently transmitted from the executive branch to Congress.<sup>8</sup> This document establishes three key principles of U.S. strategic policy: (1) the perpetuation of unrivaled U.S. global military dominance, so that no nation will be allowed to rival or threaten the United States; (2) U.S. readiness to engage in "preemptive" military attacks against states or forces anywhere on the globe that

are considered a threat to the security of the United States, its forces and installations abroad, or its friends or allies; and (3) the immunity of U.S. citizens to prosecution by the International Criminal Court. Commenting on this new *National Security Strategy*, Senator Edward M. Kennedy declared, "The administration's doctrine is a call for 21st century American imperialism that no other nation can or should accept."

Washington's ambition to establish a global empire beyond anything the world has yet seen is matched only by its paranoid fear of innumerable enemies lurking in every pocket of the globe ready to threaten the security of the "hometown" itself. These external threats only serve to justify, in its eyes, the extension of U.S. power. The targeted enemies of the United States at present are conveniently located in the third world, where the possibilities for outright expansion of U.S. imperialism are greatest.

Iraq under the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein is presented as the foremost rogue state, global enemy number one. Although Iraq is not yet armed with the most feared weapons of mass destruction—nuclear weapons—it is claimed by the Bush administration that it may soon obtain them. Moreover, because of the purported utter madness of its leader, Iraq is said to be so irrational as to be immune to nuclear deterrence. As a result, there is no choice, we are told, but to strike this evil regime quickly, even before it obtains the feared weapons. The UN inspection process is largely useless at this stage, the Bush administration has insisted (though overruled in this respect by the other Security Council members). Saddam Hussein, it is contended, will always find a way to hide his most critical weapons operations somewhere in the extensive complexes dedicated to his personal security, which will not be opened fully to UN inspectors, however much Iraq may agree to unconditional inspections. There is no real choice then but "regime change" (installing a puppet regime) through exercise of force—either by military coup or invasion.

It is by instilling fear in this way in an American public already primed by the events of September 11, 2001 that the administration has sought to pull the country and the world toward war. If a U.S. president and his administration can stand up day after day and insist that the United States is vulnerable to an imminent attack by weapons of mass destruction (raising the question of a surprise attack involving a "mushroom cloud" even in a case where the nation concerned has no such weapons capabilities), a large part of the population is bound to be carried along. The ceaseless repetition of these dire warnings under something like the

big lie principle, coupled with the echo chamber provided by the mass media, gradually wears away at popular skepticism. "If public support is weak at the outset," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has written with respect to convincing the population to back an unpopular war, then the "U.S. leadership must be willing to invest the political capital to marshal support to sustain the effort for whatever period of time may be required."<sup>10</sup>

So crazed have been the claims emanating from the Oval Office, in its efforts to concoct the merest shreds of a justification for an invasion, that none other than CIA Director George J. Tenet has been compelled to step out and challenge the false assertions of the president. Thus Tenet has openly contradicted the president's claim that Iraq constitutes an immediate nuclear threat to the United States, pointing out that it would take Iraq until the second half of the decade at the very least to produce enough fissile material for a single nuclear weapon. The administration has attempted to get around the weakness of its case with respect to nuclear weapons by placing more emphasis on the chemical and biological weapons threats of Iraq. In a speech delivered in Cincinnati on October 7, 2002, the president said that Baghdad might attempt at any time to attack targets in the United States with these weapons if aided and abetted by terrorist networks in delivering the weapons to their targets. Yet the CIA, in a letter to Congress signed by Tenet that same day, contradicted such an assessment, arguing that Iraq shows no signs of developing chemical and biological weapons except for purposes of deterrence and that it could be expected to refrain from sponsoring terrorist attacks in the foreseeable future if the United States does not attack it first. "Baghdad for now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with conventional or C.B.W. [chemical and biological weapons] against the United States," the letter read. However, "should Saddam conclude that a U.S.-led attack could no longer be deterred," the letter continued, "he probably would become much less constrained in adopting terrorist actions."<sup>11</sup>

### *The Trojan Horse*

The fact is that Iraq today probably does not possess functional chemical and biological war capabilities since these were effectively destroyed during the UN inspection process in 1991–1998. Its earlier capabilities in this respect date back to the 1980s when Iraq under Saddam Hussein was an ally of the United States. During 1985–1989, overlapping with the Iraq-Iran War of 1980–1988, and *after*

*Iraq's use of chemical weapons against Iran in 1984*, U.S. companies, with the approval of the Reagan and the first Bush administrations, sent numerous fatal biological cultures, including anthrax, to Iraq. Eight shipments of cultures were approved by the Department of Commerce that were later classified by the Centers for Disease Control as having "biological warfare significance." Altogether, Iraq received at least seventy-two shipments of clones, germs, and chemicals with chemical and biological warfare potential from the U.S. in these years.<sup>12</sup> The United States continued to ship such deadly substances to Iraq *even after* Iraq reportedly used chemical weapons against the Kurds in northern Iraq in 1988.

It is no secret that the United States is the country that has by far the largest weapons of mass destruction capabilities and the most advanced technology in this area. It is hardly surprising therefore that Washington is viewed by much of the world as operating with double standards, when confronting nations such as Iraq. As former chief weapons inspector for the United Nations in Iraq, Richard Butler, has pointed out: "My attempt to have Americans enter into discussions about double standards have been an abject failure—even with highly educated and engaged people. I sometimes felt I was speaking to them in Martian, so deep is their inability to understand." In Butler's view, "What America totally fails to understand is that their weapons of mass destruction are just as much a problem as are those of Iraq." The view that there are "good weapons of mass destruction and bad ones" is false. As a UN arms inspector, Butler found himself confronted with this contradiction every day:

Amongst my toughest moments in Baghdad were when the Iraqis demanded that I explain why they should be hounded for their weapons of mass destruction when, just down the road, Israel was not, even though it was known to possess some 200 nuclear weapons ... I confess, too, that I flinch when I hear American, British and French fulminations against weapons of mass destruction, ignoring the fact that they are proud owners of massive quantities of these weapons, unapologetically insisting that they are essential for their national security, and will remain so. ... This is because human beings will not swallow such unfairness.<sup>13</sup>

Far from consistently opposing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the United States, which has a greater vested interest in such weapons than any other country, has frequently blocked international attempts to limit them.

For example in December 2001, two months after the September 11 attacks, President Bush shocked the international community by killing the proposed enforcement and verification mechanism for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention on the spurious grounds that if biological weapons inspections were to be carried out in the United States they could threaten the technological secrets and profits of U.S. biotech companies.

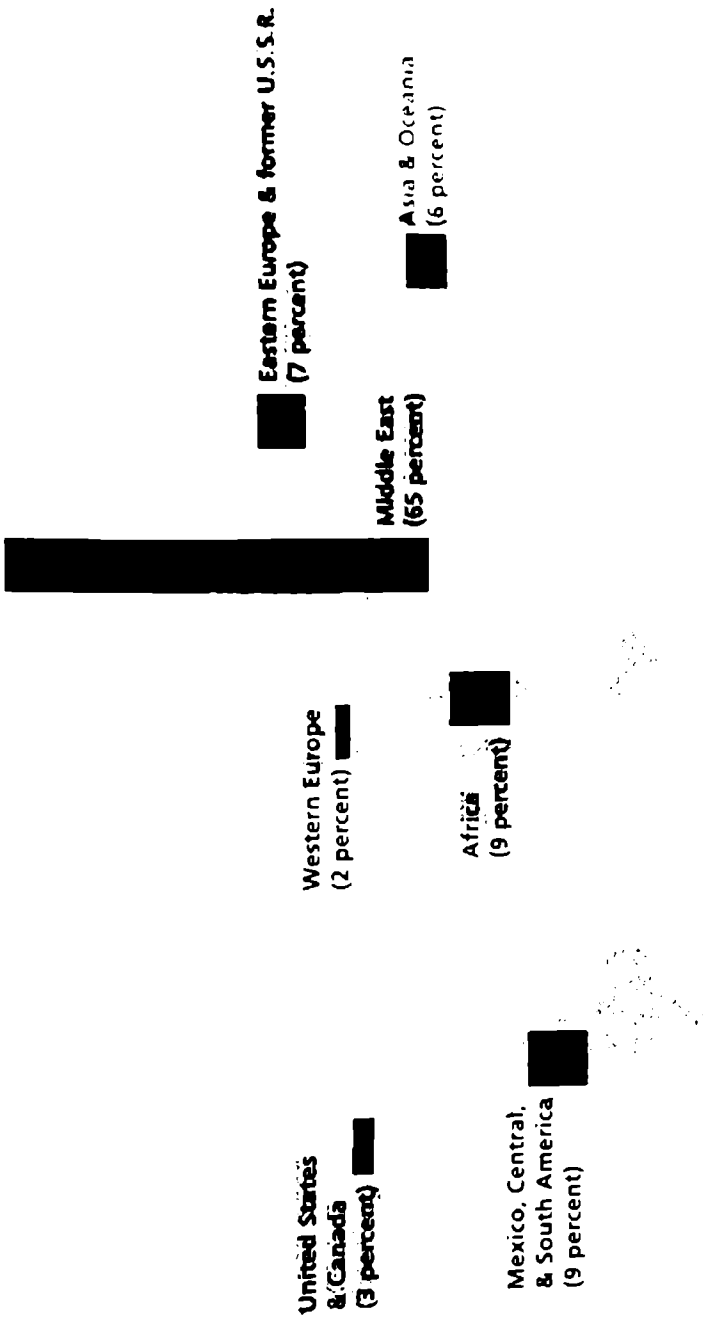
Washington's objectives in Iraq in the years following the Gulf War were inconsistent with the UN inspection and disarmament process, which was aimed at ridding that country of weapons of mass destruction. According to Scott Ritter, a former UN weapons inspector in Iraq in 1991–1998, this was evident through U.S. unilateral subversion of the inspection process.<sup>14</sup> By 1998, 90–95 percent of the proscribed weapons capacity estimated to be in Iraq was accounted for and had been destroyed as a result of the UN inspection process. The sticking point in the inspections related to the extensive set of structures devoted to Saddam Hussein's personal security and the security of the Baath Party. A procedure, known as "Modalities for Sensitive Site Inspection," was therefore agreed upon through which four UN inspectors could enter immediately and search those facilities. Yet, in the case of the inspection of a Ba'ath Party headquarters in Baghdad in December 1998, the United States, rather than simply allowing the UN to send in its four inspectors, acted on its own, by insisting on sending in additional intelligence officers. The goal was to penetrate Hussein's security apparatus, unrelated to the inspection of weapons of mass destruction—and to provoke an international incident. The whole operation, according to Ritter, was directed by the U.S. National Security Council, which gave orders directly to Richard Butler, who was then the head of the UN inspection team.

Iraq protested against this gross infringement of the Modalities for Sensitive Site Inspection and the United States used this as the pretext, in Ritter's account, for a "fabricated crisis," ordering the UN inspectors out and two days later initiating a seventy-two-hour bombing campaign, known as Operation Desert Fox, directed at Saddam Hussein's personal security apparatus. Intelligence on Baath Party hideouts obtained through U.S. violations of the UN weapons inspection process was used to guide the bombings. After that Iraq refused to readmit inspectors to sensitive sites, objecting that these inspections were being used to spy on the Iraqi government, and the UN inspection process fell apart.

In this way, Washington effectively torpedoed the final stage of the UN inspection process and made it clear that its real goal was "regime change" rather than



*World Coal Reserves*



Source: U.S. Department of Energy

disarmament. It had used the inspection process as a Trojan horse in its attempts to destroy the Iraqi regime.

### *Oil Hegemony*

Military, political, and economic aspects are intertwined in all stages of imperialism, as well as capitalism in general. However, oil is the single most important strategic factor governing U.S. ambitions in the Middle East. In addition to the profit potential of all that oil for large corporations, the fact that the United States, with about 2 percent of the known oil reserves in the world, uses 25 percent of the world's annual output gives it an added impetus to attempt to exert control over supplies. There can be no doubt that the United States seeks to control Iraqi oil production and the second largest set of proven oil reserves in the world (next to those of Saudi Arabia), consisting of over 110 billion barrels, or 12 percent of world supply. The Middle East as a whole contains 65 percent of the world's proven oil reserves (see map). Of seventy-three fields discovered in Iraq so far, only about a third are producing at present. The U.S. Energy Department estimates that Iraq also has as much as 220 billion barrels in "probable and possible" reserves, making the estimated total enough to cover U.S. annual oil imports at their current levels for ninety-eight years. It is calculated that Iraq could raise its oil production from three million to six million barrels a day within seven years after the lifting of sanctions. More optimistic figures see Iraqi oil production rising to as much as ten million barrels a day.<sup>15</sup>

The U.S. Department of Energy projects that global oil demand could grow from the current 77 million barrels a day to as much as 120 million barrels a day in the next twenty years, with the sharpest increases in demand occurring in the United States and China. At present about 24 percent of U.S. oil imports come from the Middle East and this is expected to rise rapidly as alternative sources dry up. OPEC under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, however, has kept oil supplies low in order to keep prices up. Middle East oil production has stagnated over the last twenty years, with overall OPEC production capacity (despite massive reserves) lower today than in 1980.<sup>16</sup> For this reason the security and availability of oil supplies has become a growing issue for U.S. corporations and U.S. strategic interests. As right-wing pundit and Yale professor, Donald Kagan, has stated: "When we have economic problems, it's been caused by disruptions in our oil supply. If we have a force in Iraq, there will be no disruption in oil supplies".<sup>17</sup> Already U.S. oil corporations are positioning themselves for the day when they will be able to return to

Iraq and Iran. According to Robert J. Allison Jr., chairman of the Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, "We bought into Qatar and Oman to get a foothold in the Middle East. . . . We need to position ourselves in the Middle East for when Iraq and Iran become part of the family of nations again."<sup>18</sup> At present the French oil giant TotalFinaElf has the largest position in Iraq, with exclusive negotiating rights to develop fields in the Majnoon and Bin Umar regions. The biggest deals after that have been expected to go to Eni in Italy, and a Russian consortium led by LukOil. If U.S. armed forces enter and establish either a puppet government or a U.S. mission, all of this is brought into question. Which country's oil companies should we then expect to do the negotiating for new contracts—as well as obtaining a healthy share of the oil now owned by the French and other non-American companies?

However, direct U.S. access to oil and the profits of U.S. oil corporations are not enough by themselves to explain overriding U.S. interests in the Middle East. Rather the United States sees the whole region as a crucial part of its strategy of global power. The occupation of Iraq and the installation of a regime under American control would leave Iran (itself an oil power and part of Bush's "Axis of Evil") almost completely surrounded by U.S. military bases in Central Asia to the north, Turkey and Iraq to the west, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman to the south, and Pakistan and Afghanistan to the east. It would make it easier for the United States to protect planned oil pipelines extending from the Caspian Sea in Central Asia through Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Arabian Sea. It would give Washington a much more solid military base in the Middle East, where it already has tens of thousands of troops located in ten countries. It would increase U.S. leverage in relation to Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern states. It would strengthen the global superpower's efforts to force terms favorable to Israeli expansion, and the dispossession of the Palestinians, on the entire Middle East. It would make the rising economic power of China, along with Europe and Japan, increasingly dependent on a U.S. dominated oil regime in the Middle East for their most vital energy needs. Control of oil through military force would thus translate into greater economic, political, and military power, on a global scale.

### *A Unipolar World*

In the early 1970s, as a result of the loss of economic ground to Europe and Japan over the course of the previous quarter-century, and due to the delinking of the

dollar from gold in 1971, it was widely believed that the United States was losing its position as the hegemonic capitalist power. However, in the 1990s the collapse of the Soviet Union, which left the United States as the sole superpower, and faster growth in the United States than in Europe and Japan, suddenly revealed a very different reality. The idea arose in U.S. strategic circles of an American empire beyond anything seen in the history of capitalism or of the world, a true Pax Americana. U.S. foreign policy analysts now refer to this as the rise of a “unipolar world.” The consolidation of such a unipolar world on a permanent basis has emerged as the explicit goal of the Bush administration a year after the September 11 attacks. In the words of G. John Ikenberry:

The new grand strategy [initiated by the Bush administration] ... begins with a fundamental commitment to maintaining a unipolar world in which the United States has no peer competitor. No coalition of great powers without the United States will be allowed to achieve hegemony. Bush made this point the centerpiece of American security policy in his West Point commencement address in June: “America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenges—thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace.”... The United States grew faster than the other major states during the decade [of the 1990s], it reduced military spending more slowly, and it dominated investment in the technological advancement of its forces. Today, however, the new goal is to make these advantages permanent—a *fait accompli* that will prompt other states to not even try to catch up. Some thinkers have described the strategy as “breakout,” in which the United States moves so quickly to develop technological advantages (in robotics, lasers, satellites, precision munitions, etc.) that no state or coalition could ever challenge it as global leader, protector and enforcer.<sup>19</sup>

Such a grab for unlimited imperial dominance is bound to fail in the long run. Imperialism under capitalism has centrifugal as well as centripetal tendencies. Military dominance cannot be maintained without maintaining economic dominance as well, and the latter is inherently unstable under capitalism. The immediate reality, however, is that the United States is moving very rapidly to increase its control at the expense of both potential rivals and the global South. The likely result is an intensification of exploitation on a world scale, along with a resurgence of imperialist rivalries—since other capitalist countries will naturally seek to keep the United States from achieving its “breakout” strategy.

The goal of an expanding American empire is seen by the administration not only as a strategy for establishing the United States permanently as the world's paramount power, but also as a way out of the nation's economic crisis that shows no signs at present of going away. The administration clearly believes it can stimulate the economy through military spending and increased arms exports. But enhanced military spending associated with a war may also contribute to economic problems, since it will undoubtedly cut further into spending for social programs that not only help people but also create the demand for consumer goods that business needs badly to stimulate economic growth. Historically, attempts to use imperial expansion as a way around needed economic and social changes at home have nearly always failed.

In the end what we must understand is that the new U.S. doctrine of world domination is a product not of a particular administration (much less some cabal within the administration), but rather the culmination of developments in the most recent phase of imperialism. Reversing the drive to greater empire will not be easy. But the will of the people can play a critical role in how far Washington is able to proceed with its imperial ambitions. For this reason, mobilization of the population both in the United States and abroad in a militant struggle against both war and imperialism is of the utmost importance to the future of humanity.



## “Imperial America” and War

*May 2003*

**O**n November 11, 2000, Richard Haass—a member of the National Security Council and special assistant to the president under the elder Bush, soon to be appointed director of policy planning in the state department of newly elected President George W. Bush—delivered a paper in Atlanta entitled “Imperial America.” For the United States to succeed at its objective of global preeminence, he declared, it would be necessary for Americans to “re-conceive their role from a traditional nation-state to an imperial power.” Haass eschewed the term “imperialist” in describing America’s role, preferring “imperial,” since the former connoted “exploitation, normally for commercial ends,” and “territorial control.” Nevertheless, the intent was perfectly clear:

To advocate an imperial foreign policy is to call for a foreign policy that attempts to organize the world along certain principles affecting relations between states and conditions within them. The U.S. role would resemble 19th century Great Britain. . . . Coercion and the use of force would normally be a last resort; what was written by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson about Britain a century and a half ago, that “The British policy followed the principle of extending control informally if possible and formally if necessary,” could be applied to the American role at the start of the new century.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of an American empire is no secret. It is widely, even universally, recognized in most parts of the world, though traditionally denied by the

powers that be in the United States. What Haass was calling for, however, was a much more open acknowledgement of this imperial role by Washington, in full view of the American population and the world, in order to further Washington's imperial ambitions. "The fundamental question that continues to confront American foreign policy," he explained, "is what to do with a surplus of power and the many and considerable advantages this surplus confers on the United States." This surplus of power could only be put to use by recognizing that the United States had imperial interests on the scale of Britain in the nineteenth century. The world should therefore be given notice that Washington is prepared to "extend its control," informally if possible and formally if not, to secure what it considers to be its legitimate interests across the face of the globe. The final section of Haass' paper carried the heading "Imperialism Begins at Home." It concluded: "the greater risk facing the United States at this juncture . . . is that it will squander the opportunity to bring about a world supportive of its core interests by doing too little. Imperial understretch, not overstretch, appears the greater danger of the two."

There is every reason to believe that the "Imperial America" argument espoused by Haass represents in broad outline the now dominant view of the U.S. ruling class, together with the U.S. state that primarily serves that class. After many years of denying the existence of U.S. empire, received opinion in the United States has now adopted a position that glories in the "American imperium," with its "imperial military," and "imperial protectorates." This shift in external posture first occurred at the end of the 1990s, when it became apparent that not only was the United States the sole remaining superpower following the demise of the Soviet Union, but also that Europe and Japan, due to slowdowns in their rates of economic growth relative to that of the United States, were now less able to rival it economically. Nor did Europe seem to be able to act militarily without the United States even within its own region, in relation to the debacle of the Yugoslavian civil wars.

After Washington launched its global War on Terrorism, following September 11, 2001, the imperial dimensions of U.S. foreign policy were increasingly obvious. U.S. empire is therefore now portrayed by political pundits and the mainstream media as a necessary "burden" falling on the United States as a result of its unparalleled role on the world stage. The United States is said to be at the head of a new kind of empire, divorced from national interest, economic exploitation, racism, or colonialism, existing only to promote freedom and human rights. As



Michael Ignatieff proclaimed in the *New York Times Magazine*, "America's empire is not like empires of times past, built on colonies, conquest and the white man's burden. ... The 21st century imperium is a new invention in the annals of political science, an empire lite, a global hegemony whose grace notes are free markets, human rights and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known."<sup>2</sup>

Such high-sounding words aside, what makes this "21st century imperium" an overriding concern for humanity today is Washington's increased readiness to use its unrivaled military power to invade and occupy other countries whenever it deems this absolutely necessary to achieve its ends. Yet, as Indian economist Prabhat Patnaik observed more than a decade ago, "No Marxist ever derived the existence of imperialism from the fact of wars; on the contrary the existence of wars was explained in terms of imperialism." Once the reality of imperialism has been brought back to the forefront of world attention as a result of such wars it is important to search out its underlying causes.

### *Classic Imperialism*

One of the most influential mainstream historical accounts of British imperialism in the nineteenth century was presented in an article entitled "The Imperialism of Free Trade," written a half-century ago by economic historians John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson. A part of this analysis was utilized by Haass to advance his "Imperial America" argument. The central thesis of Gallagher and Robinson's article was simple: *imperialism is a continuous reality of economic expansion in modern times*. Those who associated imperialism primarily with colonies and colonialism, and who therefore took the scramble for Africa and late nineteenth century *colonial* expansion as the basis for a general model of imperialism, were wrong. British imperialism throughout the nineteenth century remained essentially the same in its inner logic despite the concentration on expanding free trade in one period and on annexing colonies in another. As Gallagher and Robinson elaborated (in the same passage from which Haass quoted):

British policy followed the principle of extending control informally if possible and formally if necessary. To label the one method 'anti-imperialist' and the other 'imperialist' is to ignore the fact that whatever the method British interests were steadily safeguarded and extended. The usual summing up of the policy of the free trade

empire as 'trade not rule' should read 'trade with informal control if possible; trade with rule when necessary.' ... Despite ... attempts at 'imperialism on the cheap,' the foreign challenge to British paramountcy in tropical Africa [in the late nineteenth century] and the comparative absence there of large-scale, strong, indigenous political organizations which had served informal expansion so well elsewhere, eventually dictated the switch to formal rule.<sup>4</sup>

For those seeking to comprehend British imperialism in the nineteenth century, this argument suggested, it is the "imperialism of free trade" and not colonialism that should be the primary focus. Only when the economic ends of Britain could not be secured by informal control did it resort to formal imperialism or colonization—that is, direct and continuing use of military and political control—to achieve its ends. If it has often been said that "trade followed the flag," it would be far more correct to say that there was "a general tendency for British trade to follow the invisible flag of informal empire." The "distinctive feature" of the "British imperialism of free trade in the nineteenth century," these authors argued, was that its use of its military force and hegemonic power in general were primarily limited to establishing secure conditions for economic dominance and expansion.

The clearest example of such informal imperialism was the British role in South America in the nineteenth century. Britain maintained its control in the region through various commercial treaties and financial relationships backed by British sea power. As British Foreign Minister George Canning put it in 1824: "Spanish America is free; and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly she is *English*." At all times, Gallagher and Robinson state, British influence was exercised so as to convert such "areas into complementary satellite economies, which would provide raw materials and food for Great Britain, and provide widening markets for its manufactures." When left with no other way of enforcing its dominance, Britain was always ready to resort to active interventions—as it did repeatedly in Latin America in the nineteenth century.

As the distinguished German historian Wolfgang J. Mommsen noted in his *Theories of Imperialism*, the significance of this concept of informal imperialism was that it tended to bridge the gap between non-Marxist and Marxist approaches, since it stressed the historical continuity of imperialism as a manifestation of economic expansion (not confusing it simply with its more formal political-military occurrences):

By recognizing that there are numerous informal types of imperialist domination which precede or accompany the establishment of formal rule, or even make it unnecessary, Western [non-Marxist] thinking on the subject of imperialism has drawn closer to Marxist theory. . . . Generally speaking, most non-Marxist theoreticians admit nowadays that dependency of an imperialist sort may well result from the most varied kinds of informal influence, especially of an economic nature. Imperialist forces at the colonial periphery were by no means obliged constantly to resort to the actual use of political power: it was generally quite enough to know that the imperialist groups could count on support from the metropolitan power in the event of a crisis. Formal political rule thus appears only as the most specific, but not the normal type of imperialist dependence.<sup>4</sup>

Ironically, Gallagher and Robinson distinguished their approach from the classic accounts of John Hobson and Lenin by associating both Hobson's and Lenin's views with a narrower spectrum of cases involving formal control or colonialism. By identifying the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when colonial annexations were at their height, as a qualitatively new stage of capitalism—the monopoly or imperialist stage—Lenin in particular, these authors argued, had come to associate imperialism with formal rather than informal control.

However, this criticism fell wide of the mark, since Lenin himself had emphasized that imperialism did not necessarily involve formal control, as witnessed especially by British imperialism in Latin America in the nineteenth century. "The division of the world into . . . colony-owning countries on the one hand and colonies on the other," he observed, did not exhaust the core-periphery relations between nation states. Indeed Lenin pointed to "a variety of forms of dependent countries; countries, which, officially, are politically independent, but which are, in fact, enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence . . . the semi-colony," including cases like Argentina, which was so dependent financially on London that it was a virtual colony.<sup>5</sup>

The reality of an informal imperialism of free trade (or imperialism without colonies) was never an enigma to Marxist theory, which viewed imperialism as a historical process associated with capitalist expansion—only secondarily affected by the particular political forms in which it manifested itself. The reason for characterizing the last quarter of the nineteenth century as the imperialist stage in the work of Lenin and most subsequent Marxist theorists, did not have to do mainly with a shift from informal to formal imperialism, or the mere fact of wide-

spread annexations within the periphery, but rather with the evolution of capitalism itself, which had developed into its *monopoly* stage, creating a qualitatively new type of imperialism. It was this historically specific analysis of imperialism as a manifestation of capitalist development in all of its complexity (economic, political, and military) that was to give the Marxist theory of imperialism its importance as a coherent way of understanding the deeper globalizing tendencies of the system.

In this interpretation, there was a sense in which imperialism was inherent in capitalism from the beginning. Many of the features of contemporary imperialism, such as the development of the world market, the division between core and periphery, the competitive hunt for colonies or semi-colonies, the extraction of surplus, the securing of raw materials to bring back to the mother country, etc. are part of capitalism as a global system from the late fifteenth century on. Imperialism, in the widest sense, had its sources in the accumulation dynamic of the system (as basic as the pursuit of profits itself), which encouraged the countries at the center of the capitalist world economy, and particularly the wealthy interests within these countries, to feather their own nests by appropriating surplus and vital resources from the periphery—what Pierre Jalée called “the pillage of the third world.” By a variety of coercive means, the poorer satellite economies were so structured—beginning in the age of conquest in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—that their systems of production and distribution served not so much their own needs as those of the dominant metropolises. Nevertheless, the recognition of such commonalities in imperialism in the various phases of capitalist development was entirely consistent with the observation that there had been a qualitative change in the nature and significance of imperialism that commenced in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, sufficient to cause Lenin to associate this with a new stage of capitalism.

Marxists have therefore often distinguished between an older imperialism and what was called the “new imperialism” that began in the final decades of the nineteenth century. What distinguished this new imperialism were primarily two things: (1) the breakdown of British hegemony and increased competition for control over global territories between the various advanced capitalist states; and (2) the rise of monopolistic corporations—large, integrated industrial and financial firms—as the dominant economic actors in all of the advanced capitalist states. The new mammoth corporations by their very nature sought to expand beyond national bounds and dominate global production and consumption. The

drive to monopoly control within larger and larger spheres is basic to business. Monopolistic firms engaged in this imperial struggle were frequently favored by their own nation states. The Marxist theory of the new imperialism, with its focus on the rise of the giant firms, thus pointed to the changed global economic circumstances that were to emerge along with what later came to be known as multinational or global corporations. All of this became the context in which older phenomena, such as the extraction of surplus, the race for control of raw materials and resources, the creation of economic dependencies in the global periphery and the unending contest among rival capitalist powers, manifested themselves in new and transformed ways.

It was this understanding of imperialism as a historical reality of capitalist development, one that took on new characteristics as the system itself evolved, that most sharply separated the Marxist approach from mainstream interpretations. The latter frequently saw imperialism as a mere policy and associated it primarily with political and military actions on the part of states. In the more widely disseminated mainstream view (from which realist economic historians like Gallagher and Robinson dissented), imperialism was present only in overt instances of political and territorial control ushered in by actual military conquest. In the contrasting Marxist view, imperialism occurred not simply through the policies of states but also through the actions of corporations and the mechanisms of trade, finance, and investment. It involved a whole constellation of class relations, including the nurturing of local collaborators or comprador elements in the dependent societies. Any explanation of how modern imperialism worked thus necessitated a description of the entire system of monopoly capitalism. Informal control of countries on the periphery of the capitalist world system by countries at the center of the system was as important, in this view, as formal control. Struggles over hegemony and more generally rivalries among the leading capitalist states were continuous, but took on changing forms depending on the economic, political, and military resources at their disposal.

### *"Imperial America" in the Post-Cold War World*

If the main distinguishing feature of modern imperialism, in the Marxist view, was associated with the rise to dominance of the giant corporations, the ordering of power within the system, as reflected in the relative position of various nation states, nonetheless shifted considerably over time. In the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century the principal global reality was the decline in British hegemony and the increased rivalry among the advanced capitalist states that followed, leading to the First and Second World Wars. The rise of the Soviet Union in the context of the First World War posed an external challenge to the system eventually leading to a Cold War struggle between the United States, the new hegemonic power of the capitalist world economy following the Second World War, and the Soviet Union. The fall of the latter in 1991 left the United States as the sole superpower. By the end of the 1990s the United States had gained on its main economic rivals as well. The result of all of this by the beginning of the new century, as Henry Kissinger declared in 2001, was that the United States had achieved “a pre-eminence not enjoyed by even the greatest empires of the past.”<sup>6</sup>

This naturally led to the question: what was the United States to do with its enormous “surplus of power”? Washington’s answer, particularly after 9/11, has been to pursue its imperial ambitions through renewed interventions in the global periphery—on a scale not seen since the Vietnam War. In the waging of its imperial War on Terrorism the U.S. state is at one with the expansionary goals of U.S. business. As *Business Week Online*, in early February 2003, expressed the economic benefits to be derived from a U.S. invasion of Iraq: “Since the U.S. military would control Iraq’s oil and gas deposits [the second largest known reserves in the world after Saudi Arabia] for some time, U.S. companies could be in line for a lucrative slice of the business. They may snag drilling rights too.”<sup>7</sup> Companies in the oil service industry, which is dominated by the United States, might “feel just as victorious as the U.S. Special Forces.” Indeed, the main object of such military invasions is regime change and the subsequent restructuring of the economy of the “rogue state”—so-called because it stands outside the imperial order defined primarily by the United States—to make it conform to the dominant requirements of the capitalist world economy, which include opening up its resources to more extensive exploitation.

Richard Haass (whose responsibilities in the present administration were extended to include those of U.S. coordinator of policy for the future of Afghanistan) pointed out that regime change often can only be accomplished through a full-scale military invasion leaving the conquered nation in ruins and necessitating subsequent “nation-building”:

It is difficult to target specific individuals with military force. . . . U.S. efforts to use force to bring about changes in political leadership failed in the cases of Qaddafi in

Libya, Saddam in Iraq, and Aideed in Somalia. Force can create a context in which political change is more likely, but without extraordinary intelligence and more than a little good fortune, force by itself is unlikely to bring about specific political changes. The only way to increase the likelihood of such change is through highly intrusive forms of intervention, such as nation-building, which involves first eliminating all opposition and then engaging in an occupation that allows for substantial engineering of another society.<sup>8</sup>

Such a “nation-building” occupation, Haass stressed, involves “defeating and disarming any local opposition and establishing a political authority that enjoys a monopoly or near-monopoly of control over the legitimate use of force.” (This is Max Weber’s well-known definition of a state—though imposed in this case by an invading force.) It therefore requires, as Haass observed quoting one foreign policy analyst, an occupation of “imperial proportions and possibly of endless duration.”<sup>9</sup>

It is precisely this kind of invasion of “imperial proportions” and uncertain duration that now seems to be the main agenda of Washington’s War on Terrorism. In the occupation and “nation-building” processes following invasions (as in the case of Afghanistan), explicit colonialism, in the most brazen nineteenth century sense, will be avoided. No formal annexation will take place, and at least a pretense of local rule will be established from the beginning, even during direct military occupation. Nevertheless, a central goal will be to achieve some of what colonialism in its classic form previously accomplished. As Magdoff pointed out,

Colonialism, considered as the direct application of military and political force, was essential to reshape the social and economic institutions of many of the dependent countries to the needs of the metropolitan centers. Once this reshaping had been accomplished economic forces—the international price, marketing and financial systems—were by themselves sufficient to perpetuate and indeed intensify the relationship of dominance and exploitation between mother country and colony. In these circumstances, the colony could be granted formal political independence without changing anything essential, and without interfering too seriously with the interests which had originally led to the conquest of the colony.<sup>10</sup>

Something of this sort is occurring in Afghanistan and is now being envisioned for Iraq. Once a country has been completely disarmed and “reshaped” to

fit the needs of the countries at the center of the capitalist world, “nation-building” will be complete and the occupation will presumably come to an end. But in areas that contain vital resources like oil (or that are deemed to be of strategic significance in gaining access to such resources), a shift back from formal to informal imperialism after an invasion may be slow to take place—or will occur only in very limited ways. “Informal control” or the mechanism of global accumulation that systematically favors the core nations, constitutes the normal means through which imperialist exploitation of the periphery operates. But this requires, on occasion, extraordinary means in order to bring recalcitrant states back into conformity with the market and with the international hierarchy of power.

At present, U.S. imperialism appears particularly blatant because it is linked directly with war in this way, and points to an endless series of wars in the future to achieve essentially the same ends. However, if we wish to understand the underlying forces at work, we should not let this heightened militarism and aggression distract us from the inner logic of imperialism, most evident in the rising gap in income and wealth between rich and poor countries, and in the net transfers of economic surplus from periphery to center that make this possible. The growing polarization of wealth and poverty between nations (a polarization that exists within nations as well) is the system’s crowning achievement on the world stage. It is also what is ultimately at issue in the struggle against modern imperialism. As Magdoff argues in *Imperialism without Colonies*, there is an “essential oneness” to economic, political, and military domination under capitalism.<sup>11</sup>

Those seeking to oppose the manifestations of imperialism must recognize that it is impossible to challenge any one of them effectively without calling into question all the others—and hence the entire system.



## The New Age of Imperialism

*July–August 2003*

Imperialism is meant to serve the needs of a ruling class much more than a nation. It has nothing to do with democracy. Perhaps for that reason it has often been characterized as a parasitic phenomenon—even by critics as astute as John Hobson in his 1902 classic, *Imperialism: A Study*.<sup>1</sup> And from there it is unfortunately all too easy to slide into the crude notion that imperialist expansion is simply a product of powerful groups of individuals who have hijacked a nation's foreign policy to serve their own narrow ends.

Numerous critics of the current expansion of the American empire—both on the U.S. left and in Europe—now argue that the United States under the administration of George W. Bush has been taken over by a neoconservative cabal, led by such figures as Paul Wolfowitz (deputy secretary of defense), Lewis Libby (the vice president's chief of staff), and Richard Perle (of the Defense Policy Board). This cabal is said to have the strong backing of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and Vice President Cheney, and, through them, President Bush. The rise to prominence of the neoconservative hegemonists within the administration is thought to have been brought on by the undemocratic 2000 election, in which the Supreme Court appointed Bush as president, and by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which suddenly enlarged the national security state. All of this has contributed, we are told, to a unilateralist and belligerent foreign policy at odds with the historic U.S. role in the world. As the *Economist* magazine asked: "So has a cabal taken over the foreign policy of the most powerful country in the world? Is a tiny group of ideologues using undue power to intervene in the inter-

nal affairs of other countries, create an empire, trash international law—and damn the consequences?”<sup>2</sup>

The *Economist*'s own answer was “Not really.” Rightly rejecting the cabal theory, it argued instead that “the neo-cons are part of a broader movement” and that a “near-consensus [among U.S. policy elites] is found around the notion that America should use its power vigorously to reshape the world.” But what is missing from the *Economist* and from all such mainstream discussions is the recognition that imperialism in this case, as always, is not simply a *policy* but a *systematic reality* arising from the very nature of capitalist development. The historical changes in imperialism, associated with the rise of what has been called a “unipolar world,” defy any attempt to reduce current developments to the misguided ambitions of a few powerful individuals. It is therefore necessary to address the historical underpinnings of the new age of U.S. imperialism, including both its deeper causes and the particular actors that are helping to shape its present path.

### *The Age of Imperialism*

The question of whether the United States in engaging in imperialist expansion has allowed itself to become prey to the particular whims of those at society's political helm is not a new one. Harry Magdoff addressed this thesis on the very first page of his 1969 book, *The Age of Imperialism: The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy*—a work that can be said to have reintroduced the systematic study of imperialism in the United States. “Is the [Vietnam] war part of a more general and consistent scheme of United States external policies,” he asked, “or is it an aberration of a particular group of men in power?”<sup>3</sup> The answer of course was that although there were particular individuals in power who were spearheading this process, it reflected deep-seated tendencies within U.S. foreign policy that had roots in capitalism itself. In what was to emerge as the most important account of U.S. imperialism in the 1960s, Magdoff set about uncovering the underlying economic, political, and military forces governing U.S. foreign policy.

The ruling explanation at the time of the Vietnam War was that the United States was engaged in the war in order to “contain” Communism—and hence the war itself had nothing to do with imperialism. But the scale and ferocity of the war seemed to belie any attempt to explain it in terms of mere containment, since neither the Soviet Union nor China had shown any global expansionary tendencies and third world revolutions were quite obviously indigenous affairs.<sup>4</sup> Magdoff

rejected both the dominant tendency in the United States to see U.S. interventions in the third world as a product of the Cold War, and the liberal penchant to see the war as an aberration of a Texan president and the advisers surrounding him. Instead historical analysis was required.

The imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was distinguished mainly by two features: (1) the breakdown in British hegemony, and (2) the growth of monopoly capitalism, or a capitalism dominated by large firms, resulting from the concentration and centralization of production. Beyond these features that distinguished what Lenin referred to as the stage of imperialism (which he said could be described in its "briefest possible definition" as "the monopoly stage of capitalism"), there are a number of other elements that have to be considered. Capitalism is of course a system uniquely determined by a drive to accumulate, which accepts no bounds to its expansion. Capitalism is on the one hand an expanding world economy characterized by a process that we now call globalization, while on the other hand it is divided politically into numerous competing nation-states. Further, the system is polarized at every level into center and periphery. From its beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and even more so in the monopoly stage, capital within each nation-state at the center of the system is driven by a need to control access to raw materials and labor in the periphery. In the monopoly stage of capitalism, moreover, nation-states and their corporations strive to keep as much of the world economy as possible open to their own investments, though not necessarily to those of their competitors. This competition over spheres of accumulation creates a scramble for control of various parts of the periphery, the most famous example of which was the scramble for Africa in the late nineteenth century in which all of the Western European powers of the day took part.

Imperialism, however, continued to evolve beyond this classic phase, which ended with the Second World War and subsequent decolonization movement, and in the 1950s and 1960s a later phase presented its own historically specific characteristics. The most important of these was the United States replacing Britain as hegemon of the capitalist world economy. The other was the existence of the Soviet Union, creating space for revolutionary movements in the third world, and helping to bring the leading capitalist powers into a Cold War military alliance reinforcing U.S. hegemony. The United States utilized its hegemonic position to establish the Bretton Woods institutions—the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank—with the intention

of consolidating the economic control exercised by the center states, and the United States in particular, over the periphery and hence the entire world market.

In Magdoff's conception, the existence of U.S. hegemony did not bring to an end the competition between capitalist states. Hegemony was always understood by realistic analysts as historically transitory, despite the constant references to the "American century." The uneven development of capitalism meant continual inter-imperialist rivalry, even if somewhat hidden at times. "Antagonism between unevenly developing industrial centers," he wrote, "is the hub of the imperialist wheel."<sup>5</sup>

U.S. militarism, which in this analysis went hand in hand with its imperial role, was not simply or even mainly a product of the Cold War competition with the Soviet Union, by which it was conditioned. Militarism had deeper roots in the need of the United States, as the hegemonic power of the capitalist world economy, to keep the doors open for foreign investment by resorting to force, if necessary. At the same time, the United States was employing its power where possible to advance the needs of its own corporations—as for example in Latin America where its dominance was unquestioned by other great powers. Not only did the United States exercise this military role on numerous occasions throughout the periphery in the post-Second World War period, but during that period it was also able to justify this as part of the fight against Communism. Militarism, associated with this role as global hegemon and alliance-leader, came to permeate all aspects of accumulation in the United States, so that the term industrial "military-industrial complex," introduced by Eisenhower in his departing speech as president, was an understatement. Already in his day there was no major center of accumulation in the United States that was not also a major center of military production. Military production helped prop up the entire economic edifice in the United States, and was a factor holding off economic stagnation.

In mapping contemporary imperialism, Magdoff's analysis provided evidence demonstrating how directly beneficial imperialism was to capital within the core of the system. The siphoning of surplus from the periphery (and misuse of what surplus remained due to distorted peripheral class relations characteristic of imperial dependencies) was a major factor in perpetuating underdevelopment. Unique and less noticed, however, were two other aspects of Magdoff's assessment: a warning regarding the growing third world debt trap and an in-depth treatment of the expanding global role of banks and finance capital in general. It wasn't until the early 1980s that an understanding of the third world debt trap really surfaced when Brazil, Mexico, and other so-called "new industrializing

economies” were suddenly revealed to be in default. And the full significance of the financialization of the global economy did not really dawn on most observers of imperialism until late in the 1980s.

In this systematic historical approach to the subject of imperialism, U.S. military interventions in places like Iran, Guatemala, Lebanon, Vietnam, and the Dominican Republic, were not about “protecting U.S. citizens” or fighting the expansion of the Communist bloc. Rather they belonged to the larger phenomenon of imperialism in all of its historical complexity and to the U.S. role as the hegemonic power of the capitalist world.

However, this interpretation was directly opposed by liberal critics of the Vietnam War writing at the same time, who sometimes acknowledged that the United States had been engaged in the expansion of its empire, but saw this, in line with the whole history of the United States, as a case of accident rather than design (as defenders of the British Empire had argued before them). American foreign policy, they insisted, was motivated primarily by idealism rather than material interests. The Vietnam War itself was explained away as the result of “poor political intelligence” on the part of powerful policy makers, who had taken the nation off course. In 1971, Robert W. Tucker wrote *The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy*, in which he argued that the “saving grace” for the United States in Vietnam was the “essentially disinterested character” with which it approached the war.<sup>6</sup> Tucker’s perspective was that of a liberal opponent of the war who nonetheless rejected radical interpretations of U.S. militarism and imperialism.

Tucker’s main targets in his book were William Appleman Williams, Gabriel Kolko, and Harry Magdoff. Magdoff was attacked specifically for arguing that control of raw materials on a global basis was crucial to U.S. corporations and the U.S. state that served them. Tucker went so far as to claim that the error of Magdoff’s view was shown where the issue of oil arose. If the United States were truly imperialist in its orientation to third world resources, he argued, it would attempt to control Persian Gulf oil. Defying both logic and history, Tucker declared that this was not the case. As he put it:

Given the radical view, one would expect that here [in the Middle East], if anywhere, American policy would faithfully reflect economic interests. The reality, as is well known, is otherwise. Apart from the increasing and successful pressures oil countries have employed to increase their royalty and tax income (pressures which have not provoked any notable countermeasures), the American government has contributed

to the steady deterioration of the favorable position American oil companies once enjoyed in the Middle East. A *New York Times* correspondent, John M. Lee, writes: "The remarkable thing to many observers is that the oil companies and oil considerations have had such little influence in American foreign policy toward Israel."<sup>7</sup>

The case of Persian Gulf oil, then, according to Tucker, disproved Magdoff's insistence on the importance of controlling raw materials to the operation of U.S. imperialism. The U.S. political commitment to Israel was counter to its economic interests, but had overridden all concerns of U.S. capitalism with respect to Middle East oil. Today it is hardly necessary to emphasize how absurd this contention was. Not only has the United States repeatedly intervened militarily in the Middle East, beginning with Iran in 1953, but it has also continually sought to promote its control over oil and the interests of its oil corporations in the region. Israel, which the U.S. has armed to the teeth and which has been allowed to develop hundreds of nuclear weapons, has long been part of this strategy of controlling the region. From the first, the U.S. role in the Middle East has been openly imperialistic, geared to maintaining control over the region's oil resources. Only an analysis that reduced economics to commodity prices and royalty income while ignoring the political and military shaping of economic relations—not to mention the flows of both oil and profits—could result in such obvious errors.

### *The New Age of Imperialism*

Nothing in fact so reveals the new age of imperialism as the expansion of the U.S. Empire in the critical oil regions of the Middle East and the Caspian Sea Basin. U.S. power in the Persian Gulf was limited throughout the Cold War years as a result of the Soviet presence. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, to which the United States was seemingly helpless to respond, was the greatest defeat of U.S. imperialism (which had relied on Shah of Iran as a secure base in the region) since the Vietnam War. Indeed, prior to 1989 and the breakup of the Soviet bloc, a major U.S. war in the region would have been almost completely unthinkable. This left U.S. dominance in the region significantly constrained. The 1991 Gulf War, which was carried out by the United States with Soviet acquiescence, thus marked the beginning of a new age of U.S. imperialism and expansion of U.S. global power. It is no mere accident that the weakening of the Soviet Union led almost immediately to a full-scale U.S. military intervention in the region that was

the key to controlling world oil, the most critical global resource, and thus crucial to any strategy of global domination.

It is essential to understand that in 1991 when the Gulf War occurred the Soviet Union was greatly weakened and subservient to U.S. policy. *But it was not yet dead* (that was to occur later on that year) and there was still the possibility, although dim, of a coup or upset and a turnaround in Soviet affairs unfavorable to U.S. interests. At the same time the United States was still in a position where it had lost economic ground to some of its main competitors and hence there was a widespread sense that its economic hegemony had seriously declined, limiting its course of action. Although the administration of George H. W. Bush declared a "New World Order" no one knew what this meant. The collapse of the Soviet bloc had been so sudden that the U.S. ruling class and the foreign policy elites were unsure of how to proceed.

During the first Gulf War the U.S. elites were split. Some believed that the U.S. should go on and invade Iraq, as the *Wall Street Journal* advised at the time. Others thought that an invasion and occupation of Iraq was not then feasible. Over the course of the next decade the dominant topic of discussion in U.S. foreign policy, as witnessed, for example, by the Council on Foreign Relations publication, *Foreign Affairs*, was how to exploit the fact that the United States was now the sole superpower. Discussions of unipolarity (a term introduced by the neoconservative pundit Charles Krauthammer in 1991) and unilateralism were soon coupled with open discussions on U.S. primacy, hegemony, empire, and even imperialism. Moreover, as the decade wore on, the arguments in favor of the United States exercising an imperial role became more and more pervasive and concrete. Such issues were discussed from the beginning of the new era not in terms of ends but in terms of efficacy. A particularly noteworthy example of the call for a new imperialism could be found in an influential book, entitled *The Imperial Temptation*, again by Robert W. Tucker, along with David C. Hendrickson. As Tucker and Hendrickson forthrightly explained:

The United States is today the dominant military power in the world. In the reach and effectiveness of its military forces, America compares favorably with some of the greatest empires known to history. Rome reached barely beyond the compass of the Mediterranean, whereas Napoleon could not break out into the Atlantic and went to defeat in the vast Russian spaces. During the height of the so-called Pax Britannica, when the Royal Navy ruled the seas, Bismarck remarked that if the

British army landed on the Prussian coast he would have it arrested by the local police. The United States has an altogether more formidable collection of forces than its predecessors among the world's great powers. It has global reach. It possesses the most technologically advanced arms, commanded by professionals skilled in the art of war. It can transport powerful continental armies over oceanic distances. Its historic adversaries are in retreat, broken by internal discord.

Under these circumstances, an age-old temptation—the imperial temptation—may prove compelling for the United States. . . . The nation is not likely to be attracted to the visions of empire that animated colonial powers of the past; it may well find attractive, however, a vision that enables the nation to assume an imperial role without fulfilling the classic duties of imperial rule.<sup>8</sup>

The “imperial temptation,” these authors made clear, was to be resisted less because of the fact that this would have constituted a renewal of classic imperialism, but because the United States was only willing to go half way, unleashing its military force but neglecting to take on the more burdensome responsibilities of imperial rule associated with nation building.

Proceeding from a nation-building perspective reminiscent of Kennedy-style Cold War liberalism, but also attractive to some neoconservatives, Tucker and Hendrickson presented the case that the United States, having fought the Gulf War, should have immediately proceeded to invade, occupy, and pacify Iraq, removing the Ba’ath Party from power, thus exercising its imperial responsibility. “The overwhelming display of military power,” they wrote,

... would have provided the United States with time to form and recognize a provisional Iraqi government consisting of individuals committed to a broadly liberal platform. . . . Though such a government would undoubtedly have been accused of being an American puppet, there are good reasons for thinking that it might have acquired considerable legitimacy. It would have enjoyed access, under UN supervision, to Iraq’s oil revenues, which surely would have won it considerable support from the Iraqi people.<sup>9</sup>

Tucker and Hendrickson—in spite of Tucker’s argument decades earlier against Magdoff, that the failure to seize control of Persian Gulf oil was evidence that the U.S. was not an imperialist power—were under no illusions about why an occupation of Iraq would be in U.S. strategic interest, in one word: “oil.” “There



is no other commodity," they wrote, "that has the crucial significance of oil; there is no parallel to the dependence of developed and developing economies on the energy resources of the Gulf; these resources are concentrated in an area that remains relatively inaccessible and highly unstable, and possession of oil affords an unparalleled financial base whereby an expansionist developing power may hope to realize its aggressive ambitions."<sup>10</sup> The need for the United States to achieve domination over the Middle East was therefore not in doubt. If it resorted to force under these exceptional conditions, it should do so responsibly—by extending its rule as well.

This argument comes out of the liberal rather than conservative (or neoconservative) side of the U.S. foreign policy establishment and ruling class discussions. The debate within the establishment is narrow, with many liberal foreign policy analysts, because of their penchant for nation building, much closer to neoconservatives and more hawkish in this respect than many conservatives. For Tucker and Hendrickson imperialism is a matter of choice made by policy makers; it is a mere "imperial temptation." It could be resisted, but if it is not, then it is necessary to take on the liberal dream of nation building—to re-engineer societies on liberal principles.

Indeed, a remarkable consensus on underlying assumptions and goals emerged within the U.S. power elite in the 1990s. As Richard N. Haass, observed: "Liberated from the danger that military action will lead to confrontation with a rival superpower, the United States is now more free to intervene." In accounting for the limitations of U.S. power Haass declared, "the United States can do anything, just not everything."<sup>11</sup> His analysis went on to discuss the possibility of nation-building interventions in Iraq and elsewhere

More important was Haass' argument on hegemony, which pointed directly to the main differences within the establishment on the U.S. assertion of global power. According to Haass, the United States clearly was the "hegemon" in the sense of having global primacy, but permanent hegemony as an object of foreign policy was a dangerous illusion. In March 1992, a draft of the *Defense Planning Guidance*, also known as the "Pentagon Paper," was leaked to the press. This secret working document authored by the elder Bush's Defense Department under the supervision of Paul Wolfowitz (then undersecretary for policy) declared: "Our strategy [after the fall of the Soviet Union] must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor."<sup>12</sup> Questioning this strategy in his book *The Reluctant Sheriff*, Haass claimed that it

was ill conceived for the simple reason that the United States did not have the capacity to prevent new global powers from emerging. Such powers emerge along with the growth of their material resources; great economic powers will inevitably have the capacity to become great powers generally (along a full spectrum), and the extent to which they emerge as full military powers “will depend mostly on their own perception of national interests, threats, political culture, and economic strength.”<sup>13</sup> The only rational long-term strategy, since the perpetuation of hegemony or primacy was impossible, was what Madeleine Albright termed “assertive multilateralism” or what Haass termed a “sheriff and posse” approach, with the sheriff defined as the United States and the posse as a “coalition of the willing.” The sheriff and the posse need not worry much about the law, he noted, but must nonetheless be wary of crossing over into vigilantism.<sup>14</sup>

By November 2000, just before he was hired to be head of policy planning in Colin Powell’s State Department in the administration of President George W. Bush, Haass delivered a paper in Atlanta called “Imperial America,” in which he argued that the United States should fashion an “imperial foreign policy” that makes use of its “surplus of power” to “extend its control” across the face of the globe. While still denying that lasting hegemony was possible, Haass declared that the United States should use the exceptional opportunity that it now enjoyed to reshape the world in order to enhance its global strategic assets. This meant military interventions around the world. “Imperial understretch, not overstretch,” he argued, “appears to be the greater danger of the two.”<sup>15</sup> By 2002, Haass, speaking for an administration preparing to invade Iraq, was pronouncing that a failed state, unable to control terrorism within its own territory, had lost “the normal advantages of sovereignty, including the right to be left alone inside [its] own territory. Other governments, including the U.S., gain the right to intervene. In the case of terrorism this can even lead to a right of preventive, or preemptory, self-defense.”<sup>16</sup>

In September 2000, two months before Haass presented his “Imperial America” paper, the neo-conservative Project for the New American Century had issued a report entitled *Rebuilding America’s Defenses*, drawn up at the request of Dick Cheney, and including among its signatories Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, George W. Bush’s younger brother Jeb, and Lewis Libby. The report declared that “at present the United States faces no global rival. America’s grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible.” The main strategic goal of the United States in the twenty-first century was to “preserve *Pax Americana*.” To achieve this it was necessary

to expand the “American security perimeter” by establishing new “overseas bases” and forward operations throughout the world. On the question of the Persian Gulf, *Rebuilding America’s Defenses* was no less explicit: “The United States has for decades sought to play a more permanent role in Gulf regional security. While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the immediate justification, the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein.”<sup>17</sup>

Even before September 11, therefore, the ruling class and its foreign policy elites (including those outside neoconservative circles) had moved towards an explicit policy of expanding the American empire, taking full advantage of what was regarded as the limited window brought on by the demise of the Soviet Union—and before new rivals of scale could arise. The 1990s saw the U.S. economy, despite the slow-down in the secular growth trend, advance more rapidly than that of Europe and Japan. This was particularly the case in the bubble years of the latter half of the 1990s. The Yugoslavian civil wars meanwhile demonstrated that Europe was unable to act militarily without the United States.

Hence, by the end of the 1990s, discussions of U.S. empire and imperialism cropped up not so much on the left as in liberal and neoconservative circles, where imperial ambitions were openly proclaimed.<sup>18</sup> Following September 2001, the disposition to carry out massive military interventions to promote the expansion of U.S. power, in which the United States would once again put its “boots on the ground,” as neoconservative pundit Max Boot expressed it in his book *The Savage Wars of Peace*, became part of the dominant ruling class consensus.<sup>19</sup> The administration’s National Security Strategy statement, transmitted to Congress in September 2002, promoted the principle of preemptive attacks against potential enemies and declared: “The United States must and will maintain the capability to defeat any attempt by an enemy . . . to impose its will on the United States, our allies, or our friends. . . . Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in the hope of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.”

In *At War with Ourselves: Why America is Squandering its Chance to Build a Better World*, Michael Hirsh, senior editor for Newsweek’s Washington bureau, presents the argument of political liberals that while it is proper for the United States as the hegemonic power to intervene where failed states are concerned, and where its vital strategic interests are at stake, this has to be coupled with nation building and a commitment to broader multilateralism. However, in reality this

may only be a “unipolarity ... well disguised as multipolarity.”<sup>20</sup> This is not a debate about whether the United States should extend its empire, but rather whether the imperial temptation will be accompanied by the assertion of imperial responsibility, in the manner raised by Tucker and Hendrickson. Commenting on nation-building interventions, Hirsh declares “There is no ‘czar’ for failed states as there is for homeland security or the war on drugs. Perhaps there should be.”<sup>21</sup>

What have been called “nation-building interventions,” originally rejected by the Bush administration, are no longer in question. This can be seen in the Council on Foreign Relations report, *Iraq: The Day After*, published shortly before the U.S. invasion, and addressing nation building in Iraq. One of the task force members in the development of that report was James F. Dobbins, Director of the Rand Corporation Center for International Security and Defense Policy, who served as the Clinton administration’s special envoy during the interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo and also as special envoy for the Bush II administration following the invasion of Afghanistan. Dobbins, an advocate for “nation-building interventions”—the diplomacy of the sword—in both the Clinton and Bush administrations, declared definitively in the Council on Foreign Relations report: “The partisan debate over nation-building is over. Administrations of both parties are clearly prepared to use American military forces to reform rogue states and repair broken societies.”<sup>22</sup>

### *The Cabal Theory and Imperial Realities*

All of this relates to the question that Magdoff raised more than a third of a century ago in *The Age of Imperialism* and that is more than ever with us today. “Is the [Vietnam] war,” he asked, “part of a more general and consistent scheme of United States external policies or is it an aberration of a particular group of men in power?”<sup>23</sup> There is now a general agreement within the establishment itself that objective forces and security requirements are driving U.S. expansionism; that it is in the general interest of the high command of U.S. capitalism to extend its control over the world—as far and for as long as possible. According to the Project for the New American Century report, *Rebuilding America’s Defenses*, it is necessary to seize the “unipolar moment.”

The wider left’s tendency over the last two years to focus on this new imperialist expansion as a neoconservative project involving a small sector of the ruling class not reaching beyond the right wing of the Republican Party—resting on par-

ticular expansive interests in the military and oil sectors—is a dangerous illusion. At present there is no serious split within the U.S. oligarchy or the foreign policy establishment, though these will undoubtedly develop in the future as a result of failures down the road. There is no cabal, but a consensus rooted in ruling class needs and the dynamics of imperialism.

There are, however, divisions between the United States and other leading states—intercapitalist rivalry remains the hub of the imperialist wheel. How could it be otherwise when the United States is trying to establish itself as the surrogate world government in a global imperial order? Although the United States is attempting to reassert its hegemonic position in the world it remains far weaker economically, relative to other leading capitalist states, than it was at the beginning of the post-Second World War period. “In the late 1940s, when the United States produced 50 percent of the world’s gross national product (GNP),” James Dobbins stated in *Iraq: The Day After*,

...it was able to perform those tasks [of military intervention and nation building] more or less on its own. In the 1990s, in the aftermath of the Cold War, America was able to lead much broader coalitions and thereby share the burden of nation building much more widely. The United States cannot afford and does not need to go it alone in building a free Iraq. It will secure broader participation, however, only if it pays attention to the lessons of the 1990s as well as those of the 1940s.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, for a stagnating U.S. economy that despite its relative economic gains in the late 1990s is in a much weaker economic position vis-à-vis its main competitors than in the years following the Second World War, outright hegemonism is beyond its means: it remains dependent on “coalitions of the willing.”

At the same time, it is clear that in the present period of global hegemonic imperialism the United States is geared above all to expanding its imperial power to whatever extent possible and subordinating the rest of the capitalist world to its interests. The Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea Basin represent not only the bulk of world petroleum reserves, but also a rapidly increasing proportion of total reserves, as high production rates diminish reserves elsewhere. This has provided much of the stimulus for the United States to gain greater control of these resources—at the expense of its present and potential rivals. But U.S. imperial ambitions do not end there, since they are driven by economic ambitions that know no bounds. As Magdoff noted in the closing pages of *The Age of Imperialism*

in 1969, “it is the professed goal” of U.S. multinational corporations “to control as large a share of the world market as they do of the United States market,” and this hunger for foreign markets persists today. Florida-based Wackenhut Corrections Corporation has won prison privatization contracts in Australia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, and the Netherlands Antilles.<sup>25</sup> Promotion of U.S. corporate interests abroad is one of the primary responsibilities of the U.S. state. Consider the cases of Monsanto and genetically modified food, Microsoft and intellectual property, Bechtel and the war on Iraq. It would be impossible to exaggerate how dangerous this dual expansionism of U.S. corporations and the U.S. state is to the world at large. As István Mészáros observed, the U.S. attempt to seize global control, which is inherent in the workings of capitalism and imperialism, is now threatening humanity with the “extreme violent rule of the whole world by one hegemonic imperialist country on a permanent basis . . . an absurd and unsustainable way of running the world order.”<sup>26</sup>

This new age of U.S. imperialism will generate its own contradictions, amongst them attempts by other major powers to assert their influence, resorting to similar belligerent means, and all sorts of strategies by weaker states and non-state actors to engage in “asymmetric” forms of warfare. Given the unprecedented destructiveness of contemporary weapons, which are diffused ever more widely, the consequences for the population of the world could well be devastating beyond anything ever before witnessed. Rather than generating a new “Pax Americana” the United States may be paving the way to new global holocausts.

The greatest hope in these dire circumstances lies in a rising tide of revolt from below, both in the United States and globally. The growth of the antiglobalization movement, which dominated the world stage for nearly two years following the events in Seattle in November 1999, was succeeded in February 2003 by the largest global wave of antiwar protests in human history. Never before has the world’s population risen up so quickly and in such massive numbers in the attempt to stop an imperialist war. The new age of imperialism is also a new age of revolt. The Vietnam Syndrome, which has so worried the strategic planners of the imperial order for decades, now seems not only to have left a deep legacy within the United States but also to have been coupled this time around with an Empire Syndrome on a much more global scale—something that no one really expected. This more than anything else makes it clear that the strategy of the American ruling class to expand the American Empire cannot possibly succeed in the long run, and will prove to be its own—we hope not the world’s—undoing.

## Kipling, the “White Man’s Burden,” and U.S. Imperialism

*November 2003*

**W**e are living in a period in which the rhetoric of empire knows few bounds. In a special report on “America and Empire” in August, the London-based *Economist* magazine asked whether the United States would, in the event of “regime changes . . . effected peacefully” in Iran and Syria, “really be prepared to shoulder the white man’s burden across the Middle East?” The answer it gave was that this was “unlikely”—the U.S. commitment to empire did not go so far. What is significant, however, is that the question was asked at all.

Current U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have led observers to wonder whether there aren’t similarities and historical linkages between the “new” imperialism of the twenty-first century and the imperialism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Jonathan Marcus, the BBC’s defense correspondent, commented a few months back:

It should be remembered that more than one hundred years ago, the British poet Rudyard Kipling wrote his famous poem about what he styled as “the white man’s burden”—a warning about the responsibilities of empire that was directed not at London but at Washington and its new-found imperial responsibilities in the Philippines. It is not clear if President George W. Bush is a reader of poetry or of Kipling. But Kipling’s sentiments are as relevant today as they were when the poem was written in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War.<sup>1</sup>

A number of other modern-day proponents of imperialism have also drawn connections with Kipling's poem, which begins with the lines:

Take up the White Man's burden—  
Send forth the best ye breed—

Before discussing the reasons for this sudden renewed interest in Kipling's "White Man's Burden," it is necessary to provide some background on the history of U.S. imperialism in order to put the poem in context.

*From the Spanish-American War to the Philippine-American War*

In the Spanish-American War of 1898 the United States seized the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific, emerging for the first time as a world power.<sup>2</sup> As in Cuba, Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines had given rise to a national liberation struggle. Immediately after the U.S. naval bombardment of Manila on May 1, 1898, in which the Spanish fleet was destroyed, Admiral Dewey sent a gunboat to fetch the exiled Filipino revolutionary leader Emilio Aguinaldo from Hong Kong. The United States wanted Aguinaldo to lead a renewed revolt against Spain to prosecute the war before U.S. troops could arrive. The Filipinos were so successful that in less than two months they had all but defeated the Spanish on the main island of Luzon, bottling up the remaining Spanish troops in the capital city of Manila, while almost all of the archipelago fell into Filipino hands. In June, Filipino leaders issued their own Declaration of Independence based on the U.S. model. When U.S. forces finally arrived at the end of June the 15,000 Spanish troops holed up in Manila were surrounded by the Filipino army entrenched around the city—so that U.S. forces had to request permission to cross Filipino lines to engage these remaining Spanish troops. The Spanish army surrendered Manila to U.S. forces after only a few hours of fighting on August 13, 1898. In an agreement between the United States and Spain, Filipino forces were kept out of the city and were allowed no part in the surrender. This was the final battle of the war. John Hay, U.S. ambassador to Britain, captured the imperialist spirit of the time when he wrote of the Spanish-American War as a whole that it was "a splendid little war."

With the fighting with Spain over, however, the United States refused to acknowledge the existence of the new Philippine Republic. In October 1898 the



McKinley administration publicly revealed for the first time that it intended to annex the entire Philippines. In arriving at this decision President McKinley is reported to have said that "God Almighty" had ordered him to make the Philippines a U.S. colony. Within days of this announcement the New England Anti-Imperialist League was established in Boston. Its membership was to include such luminaries as Mark Twain, William James, Charles Francis Adams, and Andrew Carnegie. Nevertheless, the administration went ahead and concluded the Treaty of Paris in December, in which Spain agreed to cede the Philippines to the new imperial power, along with its other possessions seized by the United States in the war.

This was followed by a fierce debate in the Senate on the ratification of the treaty, centering on the status of the Philippines, which, except for the city of Manila, was under the control of the nascent Philippine Republic. On February 4, 1899, U.S. troops under orders to provoke a conflict with the Filipino forces ringing Manila were moved into disputed ground lying between U.S. and Filipino lines on the outskirts of the city. When they encountered Filipino soldiers the U.S. soldiers called "Halt" and then opened fire, killing three. The U.S. forces immediately began a general offensive with their full firepower in what amounted to a surprise attack (the top Filipino officers were then away attending a lavish celebratory ball), inflicting enormous casualties on the Filipino troops. The *San Francisco Call* reported on February 5 that the moment the news reached Washington McKinley told "an intimate friend ... that the Manila engagement would, in his opinion, insure the ratification of the treaty tomorrow."

These calculations proved correct and on the following day the Senate ratified the Treaty of Paris officially ending the Spanish-American War—ceding Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States, and putting Cuba under U.S. control. It stipulated that the United States would pay Spain 20 million dollars for the territories that it gained through the war. But this did little to disguise the fact that the Spanish-American War was an outright seizure of an overseas colonial empire by the United States, in response to the perceived need of U.S. business just recovering from an economic downturn for new global markets.

The United States immediately pushed forward in the offensive that it had begun two days before—in what was to prove to be one of history's more barbaric wars of imperial conquest. The U.S. goal in this period was to expand not only into the Caribbean but also far into the Pacific—and by colonizing the

Philippine Islands to gain a doorway into the huge Chinese market. (In 1900 the United States sent troops from the Philippines to China to join with the other imperial powers in putting down the Boxer Rebellion.) Kipling's "White Man's Burden," subtitled "The United States and the Philippine Islands," was published in *McClure's Magazine* in February 1899.<sup>3</sup> It was written when the debate over ratification of the Treaty of Paris was still taking place, and while the anti-imperialist movement in the United States was loudly decrying the plan to annex the Philippines. Kipling urged the United States, with special reference to the Philippines, to join Britain in the pursuit of the racial responsibilities of empire:

Your new-caught sullen peoples,  
Half devil and half child.

Many in the United States, including President McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, welcomed Kipling's rousing call for the United States to engage in "savage wars," beginning in the Philippines. Senator Albert J. Beveridge of Indiana declared: "God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-contemplation and self-admiration. ... He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savage and senile peoples." In the end more than 126,000 officers and men were sent to the Philippines to put down the Filipino resistance during a war that lasted officially from 1899 to 1902 but actually continued much longer, with sporadic resistance for most of a decade. U.S. troops logged 2,800 engagements with the Filipino resistance. At least a quarter of a million Filipinos, most of them civilians, were killed along with 4,200 U.S. soldiers (more than ten times the number of U.S. fatalities in the Spanish-American War).<sup>4</sup>

From the beginning it was clear that the Filipino forces were unable to match the United States in conventional warfare. They therefore quickly switched to guerrilla warfare. U.S. troops at war with the Filipinos boasted in a popular marching song that they would "civilize them with the Krag" (referring to the Norwegian-designed gun with which the U.S. forces were outfitted). Yet they found themselves facing interminable small attacks and ambushes by Filipinos, who often carried long knives known as bolos. These guerrilla attacks resulted in combat deaths of U.S. soldiers in small numbers on a regular basis. As in all pro-

longed guerrilla wars, the strength of the Filipino resistance was due to the fact that it had the support of the Filipino population in general. As General Arthur MacArthur (the father of Douglas MacArthur), who became military governor of the Philippines in 1900, confided to a reporter in 1899:

When I first started in against these rebels, I believed that Aguinaldo's troops represented only a faction. I did not like to believe that the whole population of Luzon—the native population that is—was opposed to us and our offers of aid and good government. But after having come this far, after having occupied several towns and cities in succession ... I have been reluctantly compelled to believe that the Filipino masses are loyal to Aguinaldo and the government which he heads.<sup>5</sup>

Faced with a guerrilla struggle supported by the vast majority of the population, the U.S. military responded by resettling populations in concentration camps, burning down villages (Filipinos were sometimes forced to carry the petrol used in burning down their own homes), mass hangings and bayonetings of suspects, systematic raping of women and girls, and torture. The most infamous torture technique, used repeatedly in the war, was the so-called "water cure." Vast quantities of water were forced down the throats of prisoners. Their stomachs were then stepped on so that the water shot out three feet in the air "like an artesian well." Most victims died not long afterwards. General Frederick Funston did not hesitate to announce that he had personally strung up a group of thirty-five Filipino civilians suspected of supporting the Filipino revolutionaries. Major Edwin Glenn saw no reason to deny the charge that he had made a group of forty-seven Filipino prisoners kneel and "repent of their sins" before bayoneting and clubbing them to death. General Jacob Smith ordered his troops to "kill and burn," to target "everything over ten," and to turn the island of Samar into "a howling wilderness." General William Shafter in California declared that it might be necessary to kill half the Filipino population in order to bring "perfect justice" to the other half. During the Philippine War the United States reversed the normal casualty statistics of war—usually many more are wounded than killed. According to official statistics (discussed in Congressional hearings on the war) U.S. troops killed fifteen times as many Filipinos as they wounded. This fit with frequent reports by U.S. soldiers that wounded and captured Filipino combatants were summarily executed on the spot.



*The Moro Massacre, March 9, 1906*

source: [www.boondocksnet.com/ai/aitexts/mm\\_featarms.html](http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/aitexts/mm_featarms.html)

The war continued after the capture of Aguinaldo in March 1901 but was declared officially over by President Theodore Roosevelt on July 4, 1902—in an attempt to quell criticism of U.S. atrocities. At that time, the northern islands had been mostly “pacified” but the conquest of the southern islands was still ongoing and the struggle continued for years—though the United States from then on characterized the rebels as mere bandits.

In the southern Philippines the U.S. colonial army was at war with Muslim Filipinos or Moros. In 1906 what came to be known as the Moro Massacre was carried out by U.S. troops when at least nine hundred Filipinos, including women and children, were trapped in a volcanic crater on the island of Jolo and shot at and bombarded for days. All of the Filipinos were killed while the U.S. troops suffered only a handful of casualties. Mark Twain responded to early reports (which indicated that those massacred totaled six hundred rather than nine hundred men, women, and children as later determined) with bitter satire:

With six hundred engaged on each side, we lost fifteen men killed outright, and we had thirty-two wounded—counting that nose and that elbow. The enemy numbered six hundred—including women and children—and we abolished them utterly,

leaving not even a baby alive to cry for its dead mother. *This is incomparably the greatest victory that was ever achieved by the Christian soldiers of the United States.*"<sup>6</sup>

Viewing a widely distributed photo that showed U.S. soldiers overlooking piles of Filipinos dead in the crater, W. E. B. Du Bois declared in a letter to Moorfield Storey, president of the Anti-Imperialist League (and later first president of the NAACP), that it was "the most illuminating thing I have ever seen. I want especially to have it framed and put upon the walls of my recitation room to impress upon the students what wars and especially Wars of Conquest really mean."<sup>7</sup>

President Theodore Roosevelt immediately commended his good friend General Leonard Wood, who had carried out the Moro Massacre, writing: "I congratulate you and the officers and men of your command upon the brilliant feat of arms wherein you and they so well upheld the honor of the American flag." Like Kipling, Roosevelt seldom hesitated to promote the imperialist cause or to forward doctrines of racial superiority.

Yet Kipling's novels, stories, and verses were distinguished by the fact that to many individuals in the white world they seemed to evoke a transcendent and noble cause. At the same time they did not fail to reach out and acknowledge the hatred that the colonized had for the colonizer. In presenting the Nobel Prize in Literature to Kipling in 1907 the Nobel Committee proclaimed, "his imperialism is not of the uncompromising type that pays no regard to the sentiments of others."<sup>8</sup> It was precisely this that made Kipling's "White Man's Burden" and other outpourings from his pen so effective as ideological veils for a barbaric reality.

The year Kipling's poem appeared, 1899, marked not only the end of the Spanish-American War (through the ratification of the Treaty of Paris) and the beginning of the Philippine-American War, but also the beginning of the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa. These were classic imperialist wars and they generated anti-imperialist movements and radical critiques in response. It was the Anglo-Boer War that gave rise to Hobson's *Imperialism, A Study*, which argued "Nowhere under such conditions"—referring specifically to British imperialism in South Africa—"is the theory of white government as a trust for civilization made valid."<sup>9</sup> The opening sentence of Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, written in 1916, stated that "especially since the Spanish-American War (1898), and the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the economic and also the political literature of the two hemispheres has more and more often adopted the term 'imperialism' in order to define the present era."<sup>10</sup>

*Kipling's Message to Imperialists After One Hundred Years*

Although imperialism has remained a reality over the last century, the term itself was branded as beyond the pale within polite establishment circles for most of the twentieth century—so great was the anti-imperialist outrage arising out of the Philippine-American War and the Anglo-Boer War, and so effective was the Marxist theory of imperialism in stripping the veil away from global capitalist relations. In the last few years, however, “imperialism” has once again become a rallying cry for neoconservatives and neoliberals alike. As Alan Murray, Washington Bureau Chief of CNBC, recently acknowledged in a statement directed principally at the elites: “We are all, it seems, imperialists now.”<sup>11</sup>

If one were to doubt for a moment that the current expansion of U.S. empire is but the continuation of a century-long history of U.S. overseas imperialism, Michael Ignatieff has made it as clear as day:

The Iraq operation most resembles the conquest of the Philippines between 1898 and 1902. Both were wars of conquest, both were urged by an ideological elite on a divided country and both cost much more than anyone had bargained for. Just as in Iraq, winning the war was the easy part. . . . More than 120,000 American troops were sent to the Philippines to put down the guerrilla resistance, and 4,000 never came home. It remains to be seen whether Iraq will cost thousands of American lives—and whether the American public will accept such a heavy toll as the price of success in Iraq.<sup>12</sup>

With representatives of the establishment openly espousing imperialist ambitions, we shouldn't be surprised at the repeated attempts to bring back the “white man's burden” argument in one form or another. In the closing pages of his prize-winning book, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, Max Boot quotes Kipling's poem:

Take up the White Man's burden—  
 And reap his old reward:  
 The blame of those ye better,  
 The hate of those ye guard—

Boot insists that Kipling was right, that “colonists everywhere, usually received scant thanks afterward.” Nevertheless, we should be encouraged, he tells us, by the fact that “the bulk of the people did not resist American occupation, as they surely would have done if it had been nasty and brutal. Many Cubans,

Haitians, Dominicans, and others may secretly have welcomed U.S. rule." Boot's main implication seems clear enough—the United States should again "Take up the White Man's burden." His book ends by arguing that the United States should have deposed Saddam Hussein and occupied Iraq at the time of the 1991 Gulf War. That task, he implied, remained to be accomplished.<sup>13</sup>

The title of *The Savage Wars of Peace* was taken straight from a line in Kipling's "White Man's Burden." Boot's 428-page glorification of U.S. imperialist wars received the Best Book of 2002 Award from the *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *Los Angeles Times* and won the 2003 General Wallace M. Greene Jr. Award for the best nonfiction book pertaining to Marine Corps history. Boot contends that the Philippine War was "one of the most successful counterinsurgencies waged by a Western army in modern times" and declares that, "by the standards of the day, the conduct of U.S. soldiers was better than average for colonial wars."

The U.S. imperial role in the Philippines, the subject of Kipling's "White Man's Burden," is thus being presented as a model for the kind of imperial role that Boot and other neoconservatives are now urging on the United States. Even before the war in Iraq, Ignatieff remarked: "Imperialism used to be the white man's burden. This gave it a bad reputation. But imperialism doesn't stop being necessary because it is politically incorrect"—a point that might well be read as extending to the "white man's burden" itself.<sup>14</sup>

The Philippine-American War is now being rediscovered as the closest approximation in U.S. history to the problems the United States is encountering in Iraq. Further, the United States has taken advantage of the September 11, 2001 attacks to intervene militarily not just in the Middle East but also around the globe—including the Philippines where it has deployed thousands of troops to aid the Philippine army in fighting Moro insurgents in the southern islands. In this new imperialist climate Niall Ferguson, Professor of History at the Stern School of Business, New York University, and one of the principal advocates of the new imperialism, has addressed Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" in his book *Empire*. "No one," Ferguson tells us,

would dare use such politically incorrect language today. The reality is nevertheless that the United States has—whether it admits it or not—taken up some kind of global burden, just as Kipling urged. It considers itself responsible not just for waging a war against terrorism and rogue states, but also for spreading the benefits of

capitalism and democracy overseas. And just like the British Empire before it, the American Empire unfailingly acts in the name of liberty, even when its own self-interest is manifestly uppermost.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Ferguson's claim that "no one would dare" to call this "the white man's burden" today since it is "politically incorrect," sympathetic references to this term keep on cropping up—and in the most privileged circles. Boot is a good example. Like Ferguson himself, he tries to incorporate the "white man's burden" into a long history of idealistic intervention, downplaying the realities of racism and imperialism: "In the early twentieth century," he writes, "Americans talked of spreading Anglo-Saxon civilization and taking up the 'white man's burden'; today they talk of spreading democracy and defending human rights. Whatever you call it, this represents an idealistic impulse that has always been a big part in America's impetus for going to war."

Today's imperialists see Kipling's poem mainly as an attempt to stiffen the spine of the U.S. ruling class of his day in preparation for what he called "the savage wars of peace." And it is precisely in this way that they now allude to the "white man's burden" in relation to the twenty-first century. Thus for the *Economist* magazine the question is simply whether the United States is "prepared to shoulder the white man's burden across the Middle East."

As an analyst of as well as a spokesman for imperialism Kipling was head and shoulders above this in the sense that he accurately perceived the looming contradictions of his own time. He knew that the British Empire was overstretched and doomed—even as he struggled to redeem it and to inspire the rising United States to enter the imperial stage alongside it. Only two years before writing "The White Man's Burden" he wrote his celebrated verse, "Recessional":

Far-called, our navies melt away;  
 On dune and headland sinks the fire;  
 Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
 Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!  
 Judge of Nations, spare us yet,  
 Lest we forget—lest we forget!

The United States is now leading the way into a new phase of imperialism. This will be marked not only by increased conflict between center and periphery



—rationalized in the West by veiled and not-so-veiled racism—but also by increased intercapitalist rivalry. This will likely speed up the long-run decline of the American Empire, rather than the reverse. And in this situation a call for a closing of the ranks between those of European extraction (Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" argument or some substitute) is likely to become more appealing among U.S. and British elites. It should be remembered that Kipling's "White Man's Burden" was a call for the joint exploitation of the globe by what Du Bois was later to call "the white masters of the world" in the face of the ebbing of British fortunes.<sup>16</sup>

At no time, then, should we underestimate the three-fold threat of militarism, imperialism, and racism—or forget that capitalist societies have historically been identified with all three.



## Is Iraq Another “Vietnam”?

*June 2004*

**A**n indication of just how bad things have become for the U.S. invaders and occupiers of Iraq is that comparisons with the Vietnam War are now commonplace in the U.S. media. In a desperate attempt to put a stop to this, President Bush intimated on April 13, in one of his rare press conferences, that the mere mention of the Vietnam analogy in relation to the present war was unpatriotic and constituted a betrayal of the troops. Yet the question remains and seems to haunt the U.S. occupation of Iraq: To what extent has Iraq become another “Vietnam” for American imperialism?

It is true that any direct comparison of the two wars points to the enormous differences between them. In Iraq the United States is not opposed, as in Vietnam, by a national liberation movement arising out of more than a century of revolutionary struggle against French and then American imperialism. The scale of the U.S. military intervention in Iraq is much smaller than in Vietnam and the number of casualties much smaller as well. The Cold War is long over. The geography of the war is different.

Nevertheless, Iraq, like Vietnam in the previous century, is coming to stand for the limits of American power. The United States is the sole remaining superpower, the greatest military power on earth. Yet its claim to omnipotence is now being shaken once again by popular resistance forces and hatred of the invader in a third world country. In April alone U.S. combat deaths in Iraq exceeded those from the beginning of the American invasion of Iraq to the fall of Baghdad—the period that

was supposed to have constituted the full duration of the war. No stable political solution in Iraq that is acceptable to the United States ruling class seems possible. A military solution to the conflict does not exist. And the United States, it is frequently observed, has “no exit strategy”—if indeed it intends to exit fully at all. Under these circumstances the question of defeat once again arises, paralleling Vietnam. Although the world situation has changed dramatically one cannot help but be reminded of the lines of the Chinese *People’s Daily* in 1966: “The more forces United States imperialism throws into Asia, the more will it be bogged down there and the deeper will be the grave it digs for itself.”<sup>21</sup> There is no doubt that the U.S. ruling class is acutely aware of the Vietnam analogy and concerned that U.S. imperialism is facing another disaster, which will only get worse the longer it remains in Iraq. At the same time there is an enormous momentum driving the United States toward a continuation and escalation of the war. On April 2, 1970, at a critical point in the Vietnam War, Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, declared that the enemy “cannot drive us out of Indochina. But they can force on us the choice of either plunging in altogether or getting out altogether.”<sup>22</sup> This describes the main dilemma that the United States experienced throughout the Vietnam War. It was able to plunge in deeper and deeper and did. But eventually it was compelled by its failures in the face of an implacable resistance to get out altogether—a result that was also encouraged by the growth of a massive antiwar movement at home. A similar unpalatable choice faces the United States in Iraq today. A major escalation is unacceptable to the mass of the world’s population including the populations of the major U.S. allies, and is most likely unacceptable to the mass of the U.S. population itself. However, getting out altogether is unacceptable to the U.S. ruling class, which has real spoils of war to lose and is worried about the credibility of U.S. power. Under these circumstances an escalation of the war appears likely despite the global political fallout this will entail.

The general view of the U.S. power elite can be seen in a report entitled *Iraq: One Year Later* released in March by the Council on Foreign Relations. The report’s task force was co-chaired by James Schlesinger, former secretary of defense under Nixon and Ford, and by Thomas Pickering, former U.S. ambassador to Russia and under secretary for political affairs in the Clinton administration. The task force as a whole included top figures in the U.S. foreign policy establishment, notably former U.S. representative to the United Nations and member of Ronald Reagan’s National Security Council, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, and

Rand Corporation peacekeeping expert (appointed by the Clinton and Bush administrations as a special envoy to help supervise "nation-building" in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan), James F. Dobbins. The report insisted on the need of the United States to maintain its strategic "commitment" to Iraq even in the context of a "transfer of authority" in order to: (1) prevent interference by Iraq's neighbors, (2) guarantee "long-term stability in the production and supply of oil," (3) block "the emergence of a failed state that could offer a haven to terrorists," and (4) avoid a U.S. "policy failure" with the "attendant loss of power and influence in the region".<sup>3</sup> As Schlesinger and Pickering wrote in an op-ed piece in the *Los Angeles Times*, entitled "Keep Iraq Above Politics," both the Republican and Democratic parties should "stay the course" for these very same reasons. Above all Iraq must be kept out of presidential politics: a point directed principally at John Kerry as the Democratic candidate.<sup>4</sup>

The main lesson that the ruling class seems to have drawn from the war so far is that a much larger military force is needed to maintain the occupation. According to *Business Week*, "the U.S. hold on Iraq remains weak. Staying on track will require two things: more troops to maintain security, supplemented by a craftier political strategy."<sup>5</sup> In the words of Bruce Nussbaum, *Business Week's* editorial page editor:

There is a denial [in Washington] that the military strategy going into Iraq, the Rumsfeld Doctrine, is a failure. The best hope left of establishing a stable Iraqi democracy is to replace that doctrine, which emphasizes small, light, and fast military operations, with its rival, the Powell Doctrine, devised by then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell. The Powell Doctrine calls for overwhelming force shaped by very clear political goals and a specific exit strategy, two things lacking today in Iraq. The failure of the Rumsfeld Doctrine in Iraq is all too clear—too few boots on the ground, too little legitimacy for America and its handpicked Governing Council, too many shifting goals, and no clear exit strategy. The result in recent weeks has been a cycle of kidnappings, ambushes, counterstrikes, death, and destruction that increasingly echoes the disaster in Vietnam. ... What is to be done now? A return to the Powell Doctrine would accomplish a number of key goals. Significantly higher troop levels would crush, finally, Baathist resistance and provide more security to Iraqis. ... The realpolitik of the Powell Doctrine would also force Washington to limit its goals and make its exit strategy clear.<sup>6</sup>

Such a reversion to the Powell Doctrine would mean a massive escalation of the military force in Iraq. The United States currently has 135,000 troops in Iraq and more than 150,000 in the entire Iraqi theatre of operations, which includes Kuwait and other neighboring countries. Other coalition forces, about half of which are British, have contributed another 25,000 troops to the occupation. Nevertheless, *Business Week* writes that “analysts, such as Rand Corp. peacekeeping expert and former State Department special envoy James Dobbins say that as many as 400,000 troops are needed to match the peacekeeping clout used in other volatile countries. The 250,000 Iraqis the U.S. hopes to have in uniform will help, but the security services’ recent refusal to fight fellow Iraqis shows they aren’t up to the task—and won’t be for at least a year.” This translates into a demand for stepped-up deployment of U.S. soldiers. Where are all of these additional troops to come from? Initially, according to *Business Week*, this can be accomplished by rotating back units that have already done service in Iraq. Later on some other solution to the lack of “military manpower” must be found.

Other establishment outlets agree that a major escalation is called for. The *New York Times* said, “This is not the moment for retreat and it certainly is not the moment for half measures.” Many more troops than present administration plans call for are needed according to that publication:

Sending more troops will cause further pain to an already strained military and it means acknowledging that units now being rotated home should be sent back to Iraq. But there seems to be no other choice. Much of the current trouble could have been avoided if Mr. Rumsfeld had not been so determined to disprove the doctrine named for his rival, Secretary of State Colin Powell, which posits that force, if it is to be used at all, should be overwhelming. ... The United States should have had a much larger military force ready to actually occupy Iraq and restore order.<sup>7</sup>

The momentum of the occupation thus points to a substantial escalation of U.S. force levels in Iraq at least in the short term. A major goal of the United States is to create a large Iraqi military force that can confront those Iraqi nationalists currently fighting the American occupation. But so far the efforts to create a new Iraqi army on which the United States could depend to help suppress Iraqi resistance have proven ineffectual. Although the United States has allocat-

ed \$1.8 billion to the new Iraqi army so far it has managed to train less than 4,000 out of a planned 40,000 soldiers. Half of the first battalion of the new army quit late last year on the grounds that the pay was inadequate. When the second battalion was called in to help fight the Iraqi resistance in Fallujah in April many soldiers refused, saying that they had signed up to fight Iraq's foreign enemies not fellow Iraqis.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most serious problems for U.S. imperialism is that it views most of the Iraqi population as potential enemies of U.S. strategic interests in Iraq, and has no proimperial sector of the population to rely on for support. This contrasts with Vietnam, where a century of French colonialism had left behind a considerable urban middle- and upper-class population that allied itself with the United States once the French departed. The United States disbanded the Iraqi army at the very beginning of the occupation, since it did not trust its Baathist elements. Yet, in the ethnic and religious context of Iraq the United States had no natural constituency to which it could turn to fill the political and military vacuum thus created. The Shiite majority is even less acceptable politically to the United States than the Sunnis with their Baathist connections, since the Shiites are closely linked to the fundamentalist Islamic state in Iran. The Kurds are mostly confined to the northern part of the country, are isolated from the rest of Iraqi society, and have conflicts with the United States over oil and with regard to Turkey. Without deep roots in any major sector of the population, U.S. imperialism is finding it extremely difficult to find the basis for a new Iraqi army to back up and ultimately substitute for U.S. forces.

All of this points to the fact that the biggest military obstacle that the United States faces in its occupation of Iraq is an acute shortage of troops. Here too the comparison with Vietnam cannot be avoided. As *Monthly Review* editors Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy wrote in this space in December 1969:

It is extremely important to understand that U.S. imperialism's greatest weakness is precisely a shortage of military manpower. The Vietnam war is showing that the once-widespread hope of being able to substitute technology for manpower in fighting counter-revolutionary wars is an illusion. The United States has about 3.5 million men in the armed services at the present time (the largest military establishment in the world), and of this number at least a fifth are directly or indirectly tied down by a war in one small country many thousands of miles away from home. Much of the remainder

is spread thin over more than 250 military bases located in some 30 countries around the globe. Considering the fact that the United States has arrogated to itself the role of world policeman ... the present extreme dissipation of military resources brought about by the Vietnam war and the worldwide system of bases leaves a perilously small strategic reserve for deployment in any new crisis areas.<sup>9</sup>

In earlier capitalist empires, particularly those of the British and French, it was possible to conquer and maintain control over far-flung global possessions without recourse to conscript armies from the mother country. The chief reasons for this were the weakness of colonial resistance movements, their lack of access to modern weapons (as Hilaire Belloc said, "Whatever happens, we have got / The Maxim Gun, and they have not"), and the recruitment of soldiers from amongst the unemployed and underemployed in the advanced capitalist countries (coupled with native armies drawn from colonial territories). By the time of the Vietnam War, however, the United States had no option but to rely on conscripts to carry out its imperial objectives. No longer were third world resistance movements politically incohesive, their capacity to obtain modern weaponry sufficient to fight a guerrilla war had increased, and a pool of unemployed in the United States adequate to maintain a volunteer army on the scale required did not exist. Still, the United States shied away from universal military service as a means of maintaining its empire. After the Vietnam War, which had shown the dangers of relying on conscripts to fight an unpopular imperialist war, the United States turned to a smaller all-volunteer military (made practicable by a larger reserve army of labor in a period of stagnation), under the renewed belief that technology could limit the need for troops on the ground.

In only a year Iraq has demonstrated this to be an illusion. The entire volunteer army scheme for maintaining the U.S. empire is in tatters. The U.S. ruling class is demanding more combat troops for Iraq and there are no forces available, given that the United States, eager to monopolize the spoils of war, chose to intervene in Iraq virtually alone, with significant support only from its much smaller British partner. The extremity of the situation was foreshadowed by a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report submitted as testimony before the Armed Services Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives on November 5, 2003. That report indicated "the active Army would be unable to sustain an occupation force of its present size beyond about March 2004 if it chose not to



keep individual units deployed to Iraq for longer than one year without relief." To maintain a "steady state" or "indefinite" occupation under present conditions, the CBO report stressed, troop levels would have to fall to the 38,000 to 64,000 level. The only other options were for the United States to alter rotation patterns (taxing the strength of its volunteer army and going against the basis on which recruitment and retention occurs); drawing heavily on Marine, National Guard, and special forces units; using financial incentives to try to get soldiers to accept another tour of duty; reducing its military deployments in the Sinai Peninsula, Bosnia, and Kosovo; and finding ways to privatize many military activities, thereby freeing up more soldiers for combat. (The growth of mercenary forces in the form of private military contractors in Iraq, now amounting to some 20,000 private soldiers, who do many of the things that the regular military used to do, is a product of this privatization strategy.) Even if its existing forces were stretched to their utmost, including much heavier use of the Marine, special forces and National Guard units for combat duty in Iraq, the CBO still estimated that forces available for the Iraqi theatre on a steady-state basis—without breaking the promise to the troops to keep their service in Iraq down to 12 months and without depleting force commitments elsewhere—would not be over two-thirds of the present level at best. The fact that the administration in early May announced that it would be keeping tens of thousands of troops in Iraq longer than one year, rotating some units back, is a reflection of the depth of this crisis in the available forces for the occupation.

It is in these circumstances of an acute shortage of soldiers that Congress is once again sending signals that the draft will have to be reinitiated in the United States, despite its enormous unpopularity. This is presented as a case of fairness designed to equalize the class burden of the war, which right now is falling entirely on the working class—or in establishment parlance the middle and lower classes, representing ordinary working people and the poor. "Who's doing all the fighting?" Republican Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska asked on the NBC Today show in late April. According to Hagel the War on Terrorism is possibly "a generational, probably 25 year war" and thus should fall on all classes in the society. On the same program Joe Biden, Democratic senator from Delaware, declared that the U.S. military is too small and probably could not be brought up to its needed strength except on a conscript basis. Charles Rangel, a Democratic congressman from New York, has also come out strongly in favor of a resurrection of the draft. Ralph Nader has warned:

Today, enlistments in the Reserves and National Guard are declining. The Pentagon is quietly recruiting new members to fill local draft boards, as the machinery for drafting a new generation of young Americans is being quietly put into place. Young Americans need to know that a train is coming, and it could run over their generation in the same way that the Vietnam War devastated the lives of those who came of age in the '60s.<sup>10</sup>

Given that the Iraq War has turned against the United States even supporters of the war are now demanding that the United States have a clear exit strategy. That strategy insofar as it can be said to exist now revolves around a UN-brokered plan for what is being called "a transfer of power" to Iraqi authorities by June 30. Nevertheless, the Bush administration has indicated that they intend to keep Iraqi sovereignty "limited" in any such transfer of power. Current U.S. plans, for which it is seeking UN Security Council approval, would deny the new Iraqi caretaker government any authority to enact new laws or to alter existing laws. Hence, the new Iraqi government would be precluded from making any changes in the laws put in place since the American occupation began. The caretaker government would also be denied any authority over Iraqi armed forces. U.S. commanders are to be in charge of both U.S. and Iraqi troops. The new government will almost certainly be denied control over the Iraqi money supply and its oil revenues. In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 27, John D. Negroponte, the administration's nominee for ambassador to Iraq, assured Congress that the caretaker Iraqi government would have no authority to sign long-term oil contracts.

A disturbing sign in all of this is that while it is supposedly working on setting up a caretaker government the United States is trying to recruit thousands of former Baathist military officers in order to create the nucleus of an Iraqi army that can be used to suppress the national resistance, and possibly construct the basis for a power bloc within the country that the United States can count on. This is likely to undermine any attempt to create a political process and government acceptable to the majority Shiites, calling into question the centrality of any semblance of the democratic process in the American strategy. U.S. commitment to democracy is further called into question by scandals arising from the torture and degradation of Iraqis in Abu Ghraib prison and elsewhere, undermining what few traces of legitimacy the U.S. occupation may have had in Iraq. A sovereign Iraqi government capable of carrying out its own investigations into such atrocities is clearly out of the question for U.S. imperialism.

What is obvious from all of this is that Washington is hoping to delay any substantial transfer of political control to Iraqis by denying the caretaker government any real sovereign powers. U.S. political, economic, and military goals are interrelated. Pursuit of the economic and military objectives of U.S. imperialism precludes any quick solution of the political crisis in Iraq. The primary purpose of the caretaker government, we are told, will be to set up the basis for elections leading to the installation of a supposedly genuine Iraqi government next year. In the meantime and doubtless for some time to come the real power governing Iraq will be the U.S. military. According to existing plans a U.S. withdrawal is still years away at best.

Propaganda notwithstanding, the U.S. invasion of Iraq was not meant to stop Iraq from using weapons of mass destruction (which it turned out not to have), nor was it to create a democracy in that country. The real motives of the war were to extend U.S. control over Iraqi oil supplies—the second largest reserve of oil in the world—and to create a major U.S. military presence in Iraq, probably taking the form of permanent military bases that would increase the U.S. hold over the entire Middle East. The presence of U.S. imperialism in Iraq was also supposed to help it to project its power beyond the Middle East into Central Asia, with its enormous supplies of oil and natural gas. These are the real spoils of war and have clearly been the primary concerns governing the U.S. intervention from the start. Any outcome that does not lead to continuing U.S. control—by a combination of economic, political, and military means—of the Iraqi oil reserves will be deemed a failure by U.S. capitalism, since such control and the geopolitical power that it represents was a major objective of the invasion. Thus General Jay Garner, the former head of the Iraq occupation authority, declared in an interview on BBC television on March 19, 2004, that privatization of oil and the promotion of a neoliberal economic model in Iraq had taken precedence in the administration plans over all else, including not only political changes but also restoring Iraqi electricity and water supplies.

According to General Garner, the model used when he took over in Iraq saw the U.S. imperial role in that country as analogous to the Philippines, which in U.S. geopolitical strategy in the early 20th century had been “in essence a coaling station” for the navy (gained through the Spanish-American War and the Philippine-American War that followed), allowing the U.S. military to project its power far into the Pacific and into Asia. In Garner’s words:

I think ... it’s a bad analogy, but I think we should look right now at Iraq as our coaling station in the Middle East, where we have some presence there

and it gives a settling effect there, and it also gives us a strategic advantage there, and I think we ought to just accept that and take that for a period of time, as long as the Iraqi people are willing to allow us to be guests in their country.<sup>11</sup>

Such spoils of war, viewed as means to the restoration of U.S. global hegemony, will not be readily abandoned. There is every reason to believe therefore that the United States will attempt to maintain its hold on Iraq keeping it within the U.S. Empire through a combination of military, economic, and political means.

There is a further reason for the United States to continue to prosecute the war in Iraq. Anything that would appear to be a defeat would bring back the “Vietnam Syndrome.” The Iraq War was supposed to have marked the final recovery from this “syndrome” and the full restoration of U.S. imperial power. Now suddenly memories of the most disastrous aspects of the Vietnam War from the standpoint of U.S. imperialism (frequent guerrilla ambushes, unrelenting popular resistance, flag-draped coffins, and U.S. atrocities) are flooding back. This loss of credibility for U.S. imperial power is rightly regarded by those at the top of U.S. society as the greatest danger raised by the present war. It also represents the ultimate reason that the U.S. war machine finds it difficult to withdraw, unless it can find some face-saving formula. All of this produces a momentum for a continuation and even escalation of the war.

Yet, there are also forces driving in the other direction. The most important of these is the growing Iraqi resistance. Another is the negative response with which U.S. allies are likely to greet any escalation of the war. Finally, there is the diminishing support for the war in the United States itself, which could translate eventually, if further escalation occurs, into a powerful antiwar movement. At that point the Vietnam War analogy would be inescapable.

## The U.S. Empire: Pax Americana or Pox Americana?

*September 2003*

**O**n June 10, 1963, President John F. Kennedy delivered a commencement address at American University in Washington, D.C., in which he declared that the peace that the United States sought was “not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war.” His remarks were a response to criticisms of the United States advanced in a recently published Soviet text on military strategy. Kennedy dismissed the charge that “American imperialist circles” were “preparing to unleash different kinds of wars” including “preventive war.” The Soviet text, he pointed out, had stated, “The political aims of American imperialists were and still are to enslave economically and politically the European and other capitalist countries and, after the latter are transformed into obedient tools, to unify them in various military-political blocs and groups directed against the socialist countries. The main aim of all this is to achieve world domination.” In Kennedy’s words, these were “wholly baseless and incredible claims,” the work of Marxist “propagandists.” “The United States, as the world knows, will never start a war.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite such high level denials, the notion of a “Pax Americana” enforced by American arms was to become the preferred designation for those attempting to justify what was portrayed as a benevolent U.S. Empire. Thus, in his widely read book, *Pax Americana*, first published in 1967 during the Vietnam War, Ronald Steel wrote of “the benevolent imperialism of Pax Americana” characterized by

“empire-building for noble ends rather than for such base motives as profit and influence.” A chapter of Steel’s book on foreign aid as an “element of imperialism” was entitled “The White Man’s Burden,” hearkening back to Rudyard Kipling’s celebrated poem calling on the United States to exercise an imperialist role in the Philippines following the Spanish-American War of 1898.<sup>2</sup> Such explicit imperial views, largely suppressed in the United States after the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, have now resurfaced in a post-Cold War world marked by U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and by a permanent U.S.-led “War on Terrorism.” Once again we hear establishment calls for the “defense of Pax Americana” and even renewals of the old cry to take up “the White Man’s Burden.”

Kennedy had depicted the global military expansion of the United States as an attempt to contain Communism. Today the Cold War is over. The Soviet Union is no more. Yet at the beginning of the twenty-first century the United States is viewed more than ever by the world population as an imperialist power, enforcing its will unilaterally by force of arms. Since the fall of the Soviet Union we have seen the largest military interventions by the United States in Europe since the Second World War. The U.S. war machine has waged full-scale conventional wars in the Middle East. The United States now has military bases in locales such as Central Asia that were previously beyond the reach of the U.S. Empire. In the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Washington made it clear that it was conducting a preventive war in light of the potential threat represented by weapons of mass destruction that could be used against the United States. The fact that there was no evidence of the existence of such weapons prior to the war did not seem to matter because a declaration by the administration that such weapons existed was deemed sufficient. Nor did it seem to matter after the war that no such weapons were found since once the invasion had taken place the new reality on the ground in Iraq dictated all. In this way imperialism provided its own justification.

Rather than breaking with earlier U.S. history these most recent military actions represent the continuation and acceleration of an old pattern—going back at least to the second half of the 1940s. Major U.S. interventions, both overt and covert, include: China (1945), Greece (1947–49), Korea (1950–53), Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Indochina (1954–73), Lebanon (1958), the Congo (1960–64), Cuba (1961), Indonesia (1965), the Dominican Republic (1965–66), Chile (1973), Angola (1976–92), Lebanon (1982–84), Grenada (1983–84), Afghanistan (1979–1989), El Salvador (1981–92), Nicaragua (1981–90), Panama (1989–90), Iraq (1991), Somalia (1992–94), Haiti (1994), Bosnia (1995),

Yugoslavia (1999), Afghanistan (2001-present), and Iraq (2003 present). The enormous scale of U.S. military engagement is evident in the fact that its military bases gird the globe. As Chalmers Johnson has written:

As distinct from other peoples on this earth, most Americans do not recognize—or do not choose to recognize—that the United States dominates the world through its military power. Due to government secrecy, they are often ignorant of the fact that their government garrisons the globe. They do not realize that a vast network of American military bases on every continent but Antarctica actually constitutes a new form of empire.<sup>1</sup>

The primary goals of U.S. imperialism have always been to open up investment opportunities to U.S. corporations and to allow such corporations to gain preferential access to crucial natural resources. Inasmuch as such expansion promotes U.S. hegemony it tends to increase the international competitiveness of U.S. firms and the profits they enjoy. At the same time U.S. imperialism promotes the interests of the other core states and of capitalism as a whole insofar as these are in accord with U.S. requirements. Such goals, however, frequently put the United States in conflict with other imperial states since an empire by definition is a sphere of exploitation in which a single imperial power plays the dominant role. Moreover, the logic of empire militates against all attempts to change the status quo in the periphery of the system—if not in the center as well.

For these reasons militarism and imperialism are inseparable for U.S. capitalism, as they are for capitalism as a whole. Although spending almost as much on the military as all other states combined, the United States finds itself constantly in need of more armaments, more new weapons systems, and more soldiers. As it relies increasingly on the military to maintain, and where necessary restore, its economic and political hegemony on a global scale the problem of imperial overstretch becomes chronic and insurmountable.

By the end of the Vietnam War the mask had been torn off the U.S. Empire. In 1970 Steel issued a revised edition of *Pax Americana* with a new final chapter entitled “No More Vietnams?” The main thrust of this new chapter, written in a period marked by the looming U.S. defeat in Vietnam, was entirely opposed to the chapters that preceded it. “After Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, and the Greek junta,” Steel wrote, “it is not so easy for an American President to speak with a straight face of the nation’s foreign policy being based on the ‘liberation of

man' or the 'survival of liberty.'"<sup>4</sup> Pax Americana was revealed as imperialism pure and simple.

Nonetheless, the American Imperium did not fade away with this loss of "face." The momentum behind such imperialism remained. Washington held on to its empire awaiting new opportunities for expansion. The empire struck back in the late 1970s and '80s under Carter and Reagan. The rapid decline and fall of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s opened up the way to a full-scale U.S. military intervention in the Middle East for the first time, with the onset of the 1991 Gulf War between the United States and Iraq. No longer simply intervening against revolutionary movements, the United States, now the sole superpower, gave notice to the world that a substantial departure from the global status quo in any direction would be met with overwhelming force. Noting this, Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy wrote in a July-August 1991 article entitled "Pox Americana"

The United States, it seems, has locked itself into a course with the gravest implications for the whole world. Change is the only certain law of the universe. It cannot be stopped. If societies are prevented from trying to solve their problems in their own ways, they will certainly not solve them in ways dictated by others. And if they cannot move forward, they will inevitably move backward. This is what is happening in a large part of the world today, and the United States, the most powerful nation with unlimited means of coercion at its disposal, seems to be telling the others that this is a fate that must be accepted on pain of violent destruction.<sup>5</sup>

With the rising death toll of both Iraqis and U.S. soldiers during still another war and occupation, with the atrocities and torture inflicted by the United States in Abu Ghraib prison and elsewhere leading to protests across the globe, with the barbarism of the U.S. intervention in Iraq in all of its aspects increasingly evident, it is more difficult than ever to maintain the illusion of the "benevolent imperialism of Pax Americana." The American Empire has truly become a *Pox Americana* in the eyes of the world, and exposure of its inner workings has become an urgent necessity. If the United States seems bent, as Magdoff and Sweezy suggested more than a decade ago, on playing "Samson in the temple of humanity" at least now there is a growing world awareness of that fact.<sup>6</sup>

The immediate task is to deepen this critical understanding in ways that will help equip humanity for the major anti-imperialist struggles that lie ahead.



## Empire of Barbarism\*

*December 2004*

“A new age of barbarism is upon us.” These were the opening words of an editorial in the September 20, 2004, issue of *Business Week* clearly designed to stoke the flames of anti-terrorist hysteria. Pointing to the murder of schoolchildren in Russia, women and children killed on buses in Israel, the beheading of American, Turkish, and Nepalese workers in Iraq, and the killing of hundreds on a Spanish commuter train and hundreds more in Bali, *Business Week* declared: “America, Europe, Israel, Egypt, Pakistan, and governments everywhere are under attack by Islamic extremists. These terrorists have but one demand—the destruction of modern secular society.”<sup>1</sup> Western civilization was portrayed as standing in opposition to the barbarians, who desire to destroy what is assumed to be the pinnacle of social evolution.

Altogether absent from this establishment view is the predatory role played by U.S. and European imperialism. It is true that we are living in a “new age of barbarism.” However this has its roots not in religious fundamentalism but in what Marx saw as the barbarism accompanying bourgeois civilization and what Rosa Luxemburg once called “the ruins of imperialistic barbarism.” We need to look at global capitalism and beyond that at what the United States and Britain are doing in Iraq, the principal zone of imperialist conflict at present, if we are to plumb the full depths of the barbarism that characterizes our time.

\*Coauthored with Brett Clark

### *The Concept of Barbarism*

The concept of “barbarism” has a long, complex lineage within social thought in general and socialist theory in particular. The Greek word *barbaros* originally referred to anyone who didn’t speak Greek. The Greeks like all ancient civilizations portrayed themselves as living at the center of the world and all others as residing in a geographical and cultural periphery (or semi-periphery). After the Greek triumph in the Persian Wars all barbarians were viewed as inferior. The distinction between superior civilized peoples at the center of the world and inferior barbarians on the periphery was thus basic to Greek and Latin thought. Plato presented a doctrine of natural slavery in which he took it for granted that it was right for Greeks either to render death unto the barbarians or to enslave them.<sup>2</sup>

The most developed version of the distinction between barbarism and civilization introduced by the Greeks and Romans was to be found in the work of the Greek geographer Strabo (circa 64 BC–AD 24). Strabo had studied in Rome and reflected a Romanized view of the world. His seventeen-volume *Geography* presented barbarism as representing an inverted world, in contrast to the Greeks and Romans, who had adopted “modes of life [production] that are civil.” In his theory of barbarism and civilization the geographical difference was associated with different modes of production.<sup>3</sup> Civilized peoples lived on the most fertile soils where settled agriculture was feasible. Standing opposed to civilized, bread-eating peoples, who were principally city-dwellers (and farmers who lived in close proximity to cities), were barbarians who were nomadic fighters living on meat and dairy and permanently under arms. Barbarians were seen as preferring force and living under circumstances where they had no recourse other than marauding and thievery since confined to the wilderness and removed from arable lands.

The notion of barbarism thus took on two meanings related to two conceptions of civilization. Insofar as civilization meant city-dweller, barbarism meant non-city-dweller, and particularly those living on the periphery. Insofar as civilization stood for the rule of law and culture, barbarism stood for the lack of both and the dominance of brutality. Barbarians were known for carrying out unconventional warfare. Confronted by the organized Roman army, “the barbarians,” Strabo wrote, “carried on guerrilla warfare in swamps, in pathless forests, and in deserts.”<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the key aspect dividing civilization and barbarism, according to Strabo, was the differing mode of production of each. This was principally affect-

ed by geography, with the more barbaric populations living in less fertile, more mountainous regions further north that bordered the ocean. Strabo allowed for some cultural development among barbarian populations as they learned to cultivate more civilized modes of production. In fact, he described how some barbarians were “no longer barbarians” but were “transformed to the type of the Romans” when introduced to Roman “modes of living” (production).<sup>5</sup> In particular, once the barbarians started producing meats and other raw materials for the Roman Empire, they were seen as more civilized.

If in Greek and Latin literature civilization versus barbarism was formed around a notion of center and periphery, early socialists, who viewed the feudalism that succeeded the Roman Empire in Western Europe as constituting a thousand years of universal barbarism, saw barbarism as a stage of development not simply confined to the periphery. For French utopian socialist Charles Fourier barbarism was the stage that preceded civilization. Barbarism was defined by force and the absolute enslavement of women. It came to its climax with the rise of large-scale slavery. Following in barbarism’s wake, civilization, which he saw as typified by monogamous marriage and civil liberties for the wife and as introducing large-scale industry and the class struggle associated with it, was just as brutal in many ways as barbarism but more cunning in form. In fact, Fourier argued that civilization entailed the exploitation of the world’s population and an increase in armed conflict:

Wars and revolutions devastate successively every part of the globe. Political storms, for a moment lulled, break forth anew, multiplying like the heads of the hydra beneath the blows of Hercules. Peace is but a delusion, a momentary dream, and Industry, since an island of commercial monopolists and spoliators has embarrassed the intercourse of nations, discouraged the agriculture and manufactures of two continents, and transferred their workshops into nurseries of pauperism, Industry, I say, has become the scourge of the toiling millions. . . . The commercial spirit has opened new fields to fraud and rapine, spreading war and devastation over the two hemispheres and carrying the corruptions of Civilized cupidity even into Savage regions. Our ships circumnavigate the globe only to initiate Barbarians and Savages into our vices, our excesses, and our crimes. Thus Civilization is becoming more and more odious as it approaches its end. The earth presents only a frightful political chaos, and invokes the arm of another Hercules to purge it from the social abominations which disgrace it.<sup>6</sup>

The consequence of this globalizing and in a sense still barbaric mode of production was poverty and starvation for the vast majority of the world's population and the enrichment of a small segment of the people within civilized nations.

### *Marx and the Barbarism of Bourgeois Civilization*

Marx's treatment of barbarism, while scattered in his writings, was complex and reflected the numerous contradictions embedded in civilization or capitalism in his conception, which raised the possibility of degeneration as well as progress (toward communism). He made references to barbarism both in relation to a stage of development and to issues of center-periphery. Marx also used the term "barbarism" to refer to the role of force and brutality in history and in capitalism specifically (thus referring to "the barbarism within civilization")—both at the levels of the class struggle and imperialism. In his *Ethnological Notebooks*, written at the very end of his life, he took over the concept of barbarism as a stage of human development from the work of Lewis Henry Morgan. In his *Ancient Society* Morgan identified lower barbarism with the manufacture of pottery; middle barbarism with domestication of animals in the Eastern hemisphere, irrigation and the use of adobe-brick and stone in architecture in the Western hemisphere; and upper barbarism with the manufacture of iron and the invention of the phonetic alphabet. Much of Morgan's anthropological schema, including his treatment of barbarism as a stage lying between savagery and civilization, was taken over by Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. But it is Marx and Engels's more general use of the term barbarism in relation to civilization and not the specific anthropological concept later taken from Morgan that most concerns us here.

Marx saw exploitation under capitalism as frequently occurring under conditions that were barbaric, or that reflected the predatory nature of bourgeois civilization. Referring to the degradation and pollution of life that ensued with the rise of capitalism, he wrote in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844: "The crudest *modes* (and *instruments*) of human labour reappear [under capitalism]; for example, the *tread-mill* used by Roman slaves has become the mode of production and mode of existence of many English workers."<sup>7</sup> In his 1847 speech on wages Marx metaphorically referred to the use of the treadmill in modern capitalist production (and prison systems) as a disease. "The treadmill," he observed, had reemerged "again within civilization. Barbarism reappears, but

created in the lap of civilisation itself and belonging to it; hence leprous barbarism, barbarism as leprosy of civilisation.”<sup>8</sup>

To understand the significance of Marx’s critique it is important to recognize the role that the treadmill occupied as a means of terrorizing and torturing workers who were consigned to it for a variety of offenses. Thus in 1818 William Cubbit reintroduced English prisoners to the treadmill, which, according to a description in the October 1971 *Scientific American*, employed men in “grinding grain or in providing power for other machines. Each prisoner had to climb the treadmill a total vertical distance of 8,640 feet (2,630 meters) in six hours. The feat was the equivalent of climbing the stairs of the Washington Monument 16 times, allowing about 20 minutes for each trip.”<sup>9</sup>

For Marx this reintroduction of the treadmill stood for the tortuous, life-sapping forms of exploitation frequently employed by bourgeois civilization. The treadmill was a “leprosy of civilisation” because like that disease it ate away at the body, and because leprosy, which had been prevalent in Europe during the age of medieval barbarism, served as a metaphor for the reappearance of medieval barbarism in the lap of bourgeois civilization itself. Likewise in his *Economic Manuscript* of 1861–63 Marx quoted a passage from the Russian economist Heinrich Friedrich von Storch that pointed to the degradation of the working conditions and the undermining of the health of wage workers as a reflection of the regression to barbarism that frequently accompanied the growth of bourgeois civilization.

Marx also referred to barbarism in the sense of being outside the culture of civilization, isolated from the life of the cities and from social and political intercourse. In this sense he saw the French peasantry, which played a reactionary role in supporting Bonapartism, as the class that represented “barbarism within civilization.” The periodic breakdown of economic progress under capitalism, and the poverty and hardship that this entailed, was itself a kind of regression, and hence Marx and Engels referred in part 1 of *The Communist Manifesto* to economic crisis as “a state of momentary barbarism.”<sup>10</sup>

The more global way in which Marx and Engels utilized the concept of barbarism, however, was in the treatment of the relation between center and periphery of the capitalist world economy. In their panegyric to the bourgeoisie that comprised much of part 1 of *The Communist Manifesto* they remarked how the bourgeoisie “has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeoisie, the East on the West.”

Likewise they referred to the fact that “the cheap prices of its [the bourgeoisie’s] commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate.” Marx viewed Tsarist Russia, on the semi-periphery of Europe, as a bastion of barbarism threatening revolutionary movements in the West.

But in his critique of colonialism Marx was soon to invert his treatment of barbarism, which came to stand for what the modern bourgeois of the capitalist West “makes of himself ... when he can model the world according to his own image without any interference.” “The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization,” Marx wrote in “The Future Results of the British Rule in India,” “lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked.” In his later writings, Marx became ever more critical of British imperialism in India as he became aware of what Mike Davis has recently labeled “Victorian holocausts”: the coincidence of the imperialistic expropriation of the surplus of Indian society with vast famines and the imposition of starvation wages on Indian workers. (The Temple wage that the British provided for workers engaged in hard labor in Madras in India in 1877 had a caloric value that was less than what the Nazis were later to provide to workers forced to do hard labor in the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1944).<sup>11</sup> Marx noted that British expansion was devastating India’s industry, spreading misery and degradation, while reducing the country to a producer of agricultural raw materials for Britain. In fact, British imperialism served as a force of destruction, demolishing India’s productive forces and causing underdevelopment even as it introduced the forces of modern industry into Indian society. In his treatment of “The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist” in *Capital*, volume 1, Marx quoted approvingly from William Howitt’s *Colonization and Christianity*, in which Howitt had written: “The barbarities and desperate outrages of the so-called Christian race, throughout every region of the world, and upon every people they have been able to subdue, are not to be paralleled by those of any other race, however fierce, however untaught, and however reckless of mercy and of shame, in any age of the earth.”<sup>12</sup>

A common criticism of Marx’s thought is that he saw history as inherently progressive. The work that is most widely taken as reflecting this extreme progressivism is *The Communist Manifesto*. Yet, at the very beginning of the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels noted, with respect to the class struggles that had governed the

history of all hitherto existing civilization, that “oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.” The fall of the Roman Empire, which had succumbed to a “common ruin of the contending classes” (and barbarism both within and without) was followed in the West by a long period of medieval barbarism. Neither Marx nor Engels underestimated the role of force in history, or its regressive influence. History could therefore move forward toward socialism or backward toward barbarism—or worse promote a more systematic, capitalist form of barbarism, naked in its imperialistic relations.

Marx’s analysis of ecological destruction wrought by capitalism—the metabolic rift—itself pointed to the possibility of historical regression, as ruptures in the natural systems caused environmental crises for society. By robbing the soil and polluting the cities with wastes capitalism undermined the material conditions of existence. All of civilization, he pointed out, left deserts in its wake. In the same passage in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* in which he referred to the reintroduction of the treadmill, Marx also referred to the pollution generated in the industrial cities of Britain and the ecological destruction inflicted by capitalism:

The refinement of needs and of the means of fulfilling them gives rise to a bestial degeneration. . . . Even the need for fresh air ceases to be a need for the worker. Man reverts once more to living in a cave, but the cave is now polluted by the mephitic and pestilential breath of civilization. . . . Light, air, etc.—the simplest *animal* cleanliness—ceases to be a need for man. Dirt—this pollution and putrefaction of man, the sewage (this word is to be understood in its literal sense) of civilization—becomes an *element of life* for him.

Engels—in *The Part Played by Labor in the Transformation from Ape to Man*—wrote of the human destruction of the natural environment and the undermining of civilization that this entailed. Human beings, he noted in his ecological writings, had increased the temperature of the earth in regions where forests had been extensively destroyed. None of this was compatible with a simple progressivist vision, suggesting rather that civilization carried a kind of reversion to barbarism within it as one potential line of evolution.<sup>13</sup>

*Luxemburg and "the Ruins of Imperialistic Barbarism"*

It was Rosa Luxemburg who was to promote this aspect of Marx's dialectic in the context of global imperialist expansion, the crisis of German Social Democracy, the First World War, and the rise of proto-fascism. In December 1918, a month before she was murdered following the defeat of the Spartacist uprising, Luxemburg wrote an article entitled "What Do the Spartacists Want?" She declared that a choice presented itself: "Socialism or barbarism." If the latter—the continuation of capitalist relations—persisted, the future would entail new wars, famine, and disease. The dominant classes throughout history "all shed streams of blood, they all marched over corpses, murder, and arson, instigated civil war and treason, in order to defend their privileges and their power." The ongoing development of imperialistic barbarism promised to be more brutal and treacherous, threatening to turn much of the world "into a smoking heap of rubble."

"Socialism," Luxemburg contended, "has become necessary not merely because the proletariat is no longer willing to live under conditions imposed by the capitalist class but, rather, because if the proletariat fails to fulfill its class duties, if it fails to realize socialism, we shall crash down together in a common doom."<sup>14</sup> The fate that barbarism represented was thus Marx's "common ruin of the contending classes."

In her famous *Junius Pamphlet (The Crisis in German Social-Democracy)*, written a few years earlier while she was imprisoned for protesting the First World War, Luxemburg pointed to reactionary tendencies and the horrific possibilities of a second world war that would be even more devastating in its implications. Already, capitalists were profiting from the destruction, as "cities are turned into shambles, whole countries into deserts, villages into cemeteries, whole nations into beggars." Capitalism goes forth into the world "wading in blood and dripping with filth. ... As a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilential breath, devastating culture and humanity—[and] so it appears in all its hideous nakedness." The "triumph of imperialism" involved "the destruction of all culture, and, as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration, a vast cemetery." It was in this context that she referred to "the ruins of imperialistic barbarism." Socialism in contrast offered the possibility of a new world.<sup>15</sup>

Luxemburg pointed especially to the destruction leveled on the periphery in Africa, the Middle East, and China—regions that had been targeted for conquest by European imperialists. "All the riches of the earth" would be subjugated to cap-



ial and the world's population converted into wage slaves. The "civilized world," which she properly placed in quotes, had turned into the fiercest, most brutal form of barbarism the world had ever seen—armed as it was with weapons of fearsome destruction and propelled forward by an insatiable urge for economic expansion:

The "civilized world" that had stood calmly by when...imperialism doomed tens of thousands of heroes to destruction, when the desert of Kalahari shuddered with the insane cry of the thirsty and the rattling breath of the dying, when in Putumayo, within ten years, forty thousand human beings were tortured to death by a band of European industrial robber-barons, and the remnants of a whole people were beaten into cripples, when in China an ancient civilization was delivered into the hands of destruction and anarchy, with fire and slaughter, by the European soldiery, when Persia gasped in the noose of the foreign rule of force that closed inexorably about her throat, when in Tripoli the Arabs were mowed down, with fire and sword, under the yoke of capital, while their civilization and their homes were razed to the ground—this civilized world has just begun to know that the fangs of the imperialist beast are deadly, that its breath is frightfulness, that its tearing claws have sunk deep into the breasts of its own mother, European culture. And this belated recognition is coming into the world of Europe in the distorted form of bourgeois hypocrisy, that leads each nation to recognize infamy only when it appears in the uniform of the other. They speak of German barbarism, as if every people that goes out for organized murder did not change into a horde of barbarians! They speak of Cossack horrors, as if war itself were not the greatest of all horrors.<sup>16</sup>

Inspired by Luxemburg's analysis, the Sri Lankan Marxist G. V. S. de Silva further developed the concept of barbarism. In his book *The Alternatives: Socialism or Barbarism*, he argued that the traditional Marxist notion of modes of production evolving from capitalism to socialism to communism needed to be revised. Capitalism did not necessarily lead to socialism or socialism necessarily to communism. Rather both capitalism and socialism could degenerate into barbarism, which presented a brutal alternative to communism. Barbarism in de Silva's conception was to be defined as a society relying simultaneously on: force; ideological control on the scale of Orwell's *1984*; the destruction of all countervailing power so that economic interests can rule directly with a minimal state; "induced consumption of useless products" designed to distract the population; and the extreme domination of nature in all of its aspects. Short of a revolutionary

change in the qualitative dimensions of the global economy and an end to capitalist exploitation of nature, the specter of barbarism would continue to haunt humanity. Thus, de Silva concluded ominously: “Barbarism in one or two powerful countries will overwhelm the rest of humanity.”

### *Empire of Barbarism*

Today the world is facing what de Silva feared—a barbarism emanating from a single powerful country, the United States, which has adopted a doctrine of preemptive (or preventive) war, and is threatening to destabilize the entire globe. In the late twentieth century the further growth of monopoly capital led to a heavy reliance, particularly for the United States as the hegemonic state of the world system, on military spending and imperialist intervention. With the waning of the Cold War this dependence of the imperial superpower on the most barbaric means of advancing its interests and controlling the system has only increased. The continuing decline of U.S. economic hegemony, occurring alongside deepening economic stagnation in capitalism as a whole, has led the United States to turn increasingly to extraeconomic means of maintaining its position: putting its huge war machine in motion in order to prop up its faltering hegemony over the world economy. The “Global War on Terror” is a manifestation of this latest lethal phase of U.S. imperialism, which began with the 1991 Gulf War made possible by the breaking up of the Soviet bloc and the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower.

After the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, the empire could present itself as at war with barbarism and in defense of civilization. “The barbarians have already knocked at the gates,” declares Niall Ferguson, New York University professor of history and leading defender of British and U.S. imperialism. But today’s barbarians, he charges, are Islamic fundamentalists, and liberal imperialism becomes a way of inoculating the world against such Islamic terrorism. While the knock on the gates represents a clear danger to the U.S.-dominated imperial order, these external terrorist groups, Ferguson contends, will not bring about the decline of the U.S. imperium directly. Instead, the principal threat to the position of the United States in the global economy is internal. It is rooted in an unwillingness on the part of the U.S. state to make a full claim to its position at the head of the global empire.

Ferguson, who believes that the British Empire of old should be emulated—albeit in a form worthy of the twenty-first century—argues that the world needs

an empire. Many nations would be better off dominated by the United States than having full independence. The United States, he claims, “is a guns and butter empire”—one that represents not just the rule of force but the advance of the principles of liberal empire and liberal bounty, thus yielding a more democratic and prosperous world order. It is no mere coincidence that Ferguson, one of the most influential establishment historians today, explicitly calls for an updating of the old “White Man’s Burden” (to be replaced by a new ideology of “functional” empire) while whitewashing one of the most barbaric wars of modern imperialism: the Philippine-American War at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

Ferguson’s “guns and butter empire” is now a transparent objective of U.S. policy. With the fall of the Soviet Union, as István Mészáros explained, the United States began to assume “the role of the state of the capital system as such, subsuming under itself by all means at its disposal all rival powers”.<sup>18</sup> With its immense military power and its willingness to use force, the United States hopes to keep all potential competitors permanently in check—a strategy that is likely to spell global disaster in the long run (if not sooner).

In attempting to prevent revolution (or indeed any way out for populations in the periphery), the United States is seeking to transcend the only certain law of the universe: change. In the process, it has given birth to dictators, supported terrorists, and threatened the world with violent destruction. In the Middle East the United States has nurtured a regressive, fundamentalist political Islam (useful in the CIA-directed war against the Soviets in Afghanistan and in closing off all progressive options in the Middle East) that insofar as it turns back and bites the hand that fed it—the United States and its allies—is branded as a “new barbarism.”

### *The Gates of Hell are Open*

Two years ago, Amr Moussa, head of the Arab League and former Egyptian foreign minister, predicted that “the gates of Hell” would be opened if the United States invaded Iraq. In Cairo this fall he reprised this view, observing that now “the gates of Hell are open in Iraq.” Although he was “scolded” by some for his statement two years ago, this time around, according to *USA Today* “there was no dissent.”<sup>19</sup> It is clear that the U.S. invasion and occupation has created a bloodbath in Iraq that will continue for years, given the ferocious guerrilla war that Iraqis have launched in response. The U.S. position in Iraq is deteriorating. The occupying forces have lost control over whole sections of the country. In October,

bombings occurred for the first time in the highly fortified Green Zone in Baghdad, the imperial command center in that country. Over three dozen Iraqi cities are “no-go” zones under the control of the Iraqi resistance. In the thirty days ending on September 28 there were more than 2,300 attacks by resistance forces against U.S., coalition, and Iraqi government targets in all areas of the country. “The type of attacks ran the gamut: car bombs, time bombs, rocket-propelled grenades, hand grenades, small-arms fire, mortar attacks and land mines.” Iraqi resistance forces launched more than 3,000 mortar attacks alone in Baghdad between April and the end of September.<sup>20</sup>

U.S. and British air strikes on Iraqi centers of resistance account for the preponderance of the violent deaths among the 100,000 civilians, mostly women and children, who have died so far in the war—according to a study carried out in Iraq by U.S. and British public health experts and published in the leading British medical journal.<sup>21</sup> Yet despite such fearsome attacks, which have targeted homes, hospitals, and mosques and unleashed untold levels of bloodshed and destruction, the Iraqi resistance seems only to be gaining in strength.

It is now well recognized by the ruling elements in the United States that the number of U.S. troops engaged in Iraq is not sufficient to accomplish the mission of subduing the population. Iraqis are reluctant to enlist in the Iraqi army and police, and those who have enlisted are deserting in droves. Lacking an internal force to conduct its bidding, the United States despite its vast, state-of-the-art military arsenal is short-handed. Working in support of U.S. occupation operations is deadly, as more than 700 Iraqi police officers aiding the occupation have been killed. On top of this, insurgents are inflicting wounds that strike at the very heart of the U.S. ruling class as oil pipelines are being targeted for destruction. The situation for the occupying forces is bleak: “The bottom line is, at this moment we are losing the war,” states Andrew Bacevich, former Army colonel and professor of international relations at Boston University. Yet, he continues, “That doesn’t mean it is lost, but we are losing.”<sup>22</sup> All of this has resurrected the Vietnam ghost—the seemingly inescapable symbol of U.S. defeat in imperialist wars.

Barbarism has always been associated with torture. Marx’s comments on the treadmill were aimed at the role this instrument of production played in torturing workers while reinforcing bourgeois social relations. He explored the systematic use of torture by British colonialism in India in his article “Investigations of Tortures in India” and saw the outrages of the “revolted Sepoys in India” as a “historical retribution” for such acts by their British oppressors. The systematic

use of torture by the United States in Abu Ghraib in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and on its base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba is now generating throughout the world a still deeper hatred of American imperialism. In the Philippines at the beginning of the twentieth century U.S. troops employed a torture technique known as the “water cure,” in which water was pumped down the throats of the detainees and then their stomachs stepped on to force the water out until they confessed—usually resulting in death shortly afterwards. One of the tortures used recently on a high-level terrorist suspect by U.S. intelligence is the infamous technique known as “water-boarding,” in which a prisoner is strapped down, forcibly pushed under water and made to believe he might drown.<sup>23</sup> More standard is a set of slower but highly effective torture techniques: isolation, long-term deprivation of sleep, removal from light and sound, exposure to extreme cold and heat, forcing prisoners to remain naked, use of black hoods, making them stand or stoop in stress positions, beatings, threatening detainees with guard dogs, twenty-four-hour interrogation, etc. According to the *Final Report of the Independent Panel to Review DoD Detention Operations*, also known as *The Schlesinger Report* after the chair of the Independent Panel, former U.S. Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, American interrogators have tortured at least five prisoners to death, and there are twenty-three other suspicious cases of detainee deaths still under investigation.<sup>24</sup> Much of this was given a spurious “legal” basis by the U.S. government’s refusal to grant terror suspects detained in Guantánamo and elsewhere the status of prisoners of war, thus suspending the Geneva Convention. All of this set the stage for the barbaric treatment of prisoners.<sup>25</sup>

The gates of hell are open in another respect. We live in a material world, where land, water, and air support life. The human economy and natural processes are inseparably interconnected. Today all of the ecosystems on the earth are in jeopardy. Of particular concern is global warming, which is literally pointing the earth toward an inferno of our own making. The scientific consensus on global warming suggests that at least a 60–80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below the 1990 levels is necessary in the next few decades in order to avoid catastrophic environmental effects (rising sea levels leading to loss of islands and coastal areas, increasing droughts and desertification, extreme weather events, accelerated species extinction, loss of food crops, etc.) over the coming century. Yet, the United States has steadily increased its carbon dioxide emissions since 1990. It leads the world in overall emissions, with per capita emissions at over five times the world average, and shows no signs of reversing this trend, regardless of

the devastating consequences this may have for other countries particularly in the tropics or for future generations. The war in Iraq, which is about the control of oil as a means to world domination, is itself a manifestation of the U.S. refusal to change direction regardless of the consequences for the planet. This "*Après moi le déluge!*" philosophy, as Marx intimated at one point, constitutes the very essence of barbarism.<sup>26</sup>

*"The Iraqis Will Get Tired of Getting Killed" - Rumsfeld*

As *Business Week* declared, "A new age of barbarism is upon us." But it is a mistake to attribute such barbarism simply or in the main to social forces and nations in the periphery. Just as Marx came to invert the historical treatment of barbarism as he condemned the colonial systems of his day, we need to recognize the barbarism of the strong and their culpability in creating this new age. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the voice of the new barbarism, recently stated: "At some point the Iraqis will get tired of getting killed."<sup>27</sup> Presumably he was referring to Iraqis killed by suicide bombers. Nevertheless, his statement remains inhuman in its implications in the context of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Once it has been declared, there is no end to "The Global War on Terror," which ought to be called the Global War of Terror. Only the transcendence of capitalism, in the direction of socialism, offers the possibility to escape from the current state of barbarism that is paving the way to new global holocausts and a worsening ecological collapse. Daniel Singer wrote at the end of his *Whose Millennium?* "Socialism may be a historical *possibility*, or even *necessary* to eliminate the evils of capitalism, but this does not mean that it will *inevitably* take its place."<sup>28</sup> We should heed his warning. The choice that we confront and that we will ultimately decide through our struggles is whether "socialism" or "the ruins of imperialistic barbarism" is to constitute the future of humankind.

## The Failure of Empire

*January 2005*

The United States is facing the prospect of a major defeat in Iraq that is likely to constitute a serious setback in the ongoing campaign to expand the American empire. Behind the pervasive war propaganda as evidenced in the “victorious” attack on Fallujah lies the reality of a U.S. war machine fighting a futile battle against growing guerrilla forces, with little chance for a stable political solution to the conflict that could possibly meet U.S. imperial objectives. Nevertheless, the U.S. ruling class, though not unaware of the dangers, is currently convinced that it has no choice but to “stay the course”—a slogan adopted by both political parties and accepted by virtually the entire economic, political, military, and communications establishment. The reason for this seemingly irrational determination to stick it out at all costs can only be understood through an analysis of the logic and limits of capitalist empire.

### *The Logic of Imperialism*

Capitalism is by its very nature a globally expanding system geared to accumulation on a world scale. Since its beginnings in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it has been a world economy with an international division of labor ruled over by competing nation-states. Cutting across this global system is a structure of inequality variously described as center-periphery, metropolis-satellite, developed-underdeveloped, North-South—all of which point to the wide gap that

exists between states at the center and those in the periphery of the system. From the outset, the leading capitalist states engaged in an outward, imperialistic movement. Precapitalist societies in the Americas, Africa, and Asia were pillaged, their populations enchained, and the plunder sent back to Europe. Wherever possible, noncapitalist societies were destroyed and transformed into colonial dependencies. Meanwhile, the great powers fought over the territories and spoils. As Marx wrote in "The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist" in volume 1 of *Capital*:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. Hard on their heels follows the commercial war of the European nations, which has the globe as its battlefield. It begins with the revolt of the Netherlands from Spain, assumes gigantic dimensions in England's Anti-Jacobin War, and is still going on in the shape of the Opium Wars against China, etc.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Britain, which led the way in the industrial revolution, had emerged as the hegemonic imperial power of the capitalist world economy. In this period the European powers divided up the world, either exercising direct political rule over their colonies or, where this was not practicable, creating conditions for the subordination of peripheral states to the needs of those at the center by means of unequal treaties. Britain's most important colonial possession, the jewel of its empire, was India. But Britain also exercised informal economic control in areas that were not formal colonies, as in Latin America. Wealth extracted from these colonial domains flowed into the coffers of the center capitalist nations, enriching them and enhancing their power. British hegemony over the world economy came under increasing challenge in the early twentieth century, particularly from Germany, and collapsed as a result of the First and Second World Wars, to be replaced in the aftermath of the Second World War by American hegemony as the United States rose to dominance over the world capitalist system.

In the immediate postwar world the United States was, in terms of the sheer material force at its disposal, the most powerful nation that the world had ever



seen. It accounted for about half of total world output and 60 percent of its manufacturing and had a monopoly over nuclear weapons. In place of the earlier gold standard, the Bretton Woods Agreement enshrined the U.S. dollar as the main international currency, which was backed up by Washington's agreement to redeem dollars held by the central bankers of other countries for gold. U.S. military bases in the thousands stretched across the globe. U.S. multinational corporations seized control of whole economies in the third world and, although doing so on the basis of so-called "free trade," were backed up in their economic operations and interests whenever necessary by U.S. military power.

But in many ways U.S. power was constrained. The existence of the Soviet Union, which had arisen out of a socialist revolution in the midst of the First World War, meant that there was another military superpower, which, if nowhere near as powerful as the United States, nonetheless could constrain U.S. actions, placing certain regions off-limits to imperialist expansion, and offering material support to third world revolutions. Still, the real threat to capitalism as a whole and to U.S. global dominance came not from the Soviet Union directly but from the waves of revolution taking place throughout the twentieth century as peoples in Latin America, Africa, and Asia sought to break loose from colonialism or neocolonialism, i.e., from the position to which they had been relegated in the imperialist division of labor. As the United States surrounded the Soviet Union and China with military bases and alliances and at the same time sought to counter revolutions throughout the third world it found itself up against the global limits of its power.

### *Vietnam and the Limits of Empire*

Nowhere were the limits of U.S. power more evident than in the Vietnam War. In that war the United States took over what had been a colonial war on the part of the French, blocked elections from taking place throughout the country as established by the Geneva Agreements of 1954, and divided Vietnam in half, creating a puppet regime in the South. In the 1960s a massive buildup of U.S. troops took place in what amounted to an invasion and occupation of the southern part of Vietnam. Unable to win in a guerrilla war (despite expending more than twice as much explosive power as it had employed in the entire Second World War and despite millions of Vietnamese dead) and unable to succeed at "nation building" in South Vietnam, where it sought to prop up a corrupt regime of its own creation, the United States was compelled by growing dissension amongst the U.S.

civilian population and by signs of rebellion within the lower military ranks to withdraw under the cover of the “Vietnamization” of the war. The distortions in the U.S. balance of payments in this period contributed to the diminishing hegemony of the dollar as a world currency and the end of the dollar-gold standard. For decades after the United States began its pull-out from Vietnam, the U.S. capacity to intervene militarily was severely limited by what conservatives labeled “the Vietnam Syndrome.”

The War in Vietnam, like other major imperial wars, revealed the logic and limits of capitalist empire. It is often said that the United States had no significant economic interests in Vietnam that would have justified its major intervention there. Niall Ferguson declares in his new book, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire*, that “The United States lost face [in Vietnam]. That was about all it lost.”<sup>2</sup> Such views tend to reinforce the ideology that since the United States had nothing material to lose in Vietnam it must have been there for no other reason than to promote freedom and democracy. In reality U.S. objectives in Vietnam were dedicated to the maintenance of imperialism as a system. In the broadest sense, this involved strategic goals that have been classically understood under the rubric of “geopolitics,” in which the political, economic, and military requirements of empire are placed within a strategic context that takes into account the geographic, demographic, and natural resource characteristics of particular regions. Such a geopolitical understanding of imperial expansion and defense is of course completely in accord with the necessity of the greatest possible expansion of the capitalist world economy.

The Vietnam War illustrates perfectly the importance of such geopolitical goals. The object of the U.S. intervention was to control the Pacific Rim and to surround and “contain” China as part of a more general geopolitical strategy of global dominance of the “rimlands” of Eurasia—that is, Western Europe, the Pacific Rim, and the Middle East. It was these rimlands that were the main focus of U.S. global military alliances; and it is here that the United States devoted the most resources to establishing and maintaining a military presence. They represented in fact the borders of the imperialist system, in which the United States was the hegemonic power—thus the borders of a loosely constructed American empire.<sup>3</sup>

Viewed in this way, the enormous commitment of the United States to securing Vietnam as part of its imperial sphere—a commitment maintained over five successive presidencies of both parties—was not simply irrational but part of a larger global strategy. For the U.S. ruling class and its military and foreign policy

strategists the defeat in Vietnam is remembered as a major failure in defending U.S. interests. In the 1970s the world capitalist economy entered a long-term crisis or stagnation that continues to haunt its every step. In the same period U.S. economic hegemony slipped. This partial withdrawal of the United States from the world stage after the Vietnam War as its military interventions were curtailed despite growing revolutionary movements in the third world, was often seen by those at the top of U.S. society and in the military as a source of the general sickness or malaise affecting the U.S. order.

### *The Return to War*

Since the late 1970s Washington has sought to reconstruct its capacity to engage in imperialist wars. Covert wars in Afghanistan and Central America were followed by the direct exercise of American military imperialism in Lebanon, Grenada, and Panama. With the fall of the Soviet bloc and the demise two years later of the Soviet Union itself, the United States moved to fill the vacuum of world power, carrying out military interventions in the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, and the former Yugoslavia that would have previously been unthinkable. Following the attacks of September 2001, the U.S. invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and the construction of military bases in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia constituted a vast expansion of the American empire into hitherto inaccessible regions. Such extension of U.S. imperial power was partly enabled by economic gains—although of a transitory nature—that the United States had made in the 1990s relative to its leading capitalist competitors. It was this that helped give the “antiterrorist” hawks in the administration of George W. Bush the confidence to exploit the fear engendered by the September 2001 attacks to issue the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, in September 2002. This document declared that the United States would do all in its power to prevent the appearance of another “peer competitor” in the military realm and would not hesitate to engage in “preemptive” (or preventive) interventions to advance its national security interests. This was nothing other than a declaration of perpetual war, making it clear that the United States was willing to brandish its armed might in order to expand its empire and thus its geopolitical position in the world at large. Never before in the history of the modern world has any nation laid claim to such a far-reaching strategy for indefinite global domination.

Helping to pave the way for this reassertion of U.S. imperial ambitions was a transformation in the dominant historical account of the Vietnam War. Conservative interpretations of the war propounded by the military leadership and rightwing commentators—at first scarcely taken seriously in the public discussion—became more influential and pervasive as memories of the war receded. In the new climate of making America “stand tall” again, the defeat in Vietnam was increasingly relegated to the classic propagandistic category of a “betrayal” brought on in this case by the disloyalty of the media and by extremists within the civilian population.<sup>4</sup>

The focus of this reinterpretation centered on the war’s turning point in the Vietnamese Tet Offensive of 1968. Tet, it was now said, was a resounding military victory for the U.S. and South Vietnamese military forces, which decimated their National Liberation Front attackers. Yet, in a “betrayal” of the first order, we are told, it was turned into a defeat by the U.S. media and a vocal minority of war protesters, which had the effect of inducing Johnson to throw in the towel. In effect establishment opinion adopted the same verdict on the war offered earlier by General William Westmoreland, commander of the U.S. forces in Vietnam, who wrote in 1976 that the Tet offensive represented “a striking military defeat for the enemy on anybody’s terms. ... Unfortunately, the enemy scored in the United States the psychological victory that eluded him in Vietnam, so influencing President Johnson and his civilian advisors that they ignored the maxim that when the enemy is hurting you don’t diminish the pressure, you increase it.” For Westmoreland, speaking of the Indochina War as a whole, “a lack of determination to stay the course...demonstrated in Cambodia, South Vietnam, and Laos that the alternative to victory was defeat.”<sup>5</sup>

References to U.S. failure to “stay the course” became a major theme of conservative accounts of the war. This phrase had been frequently employed in the war itself. For example, President Johnson had used it in 1967 to convey his resolve to continue the war. In another instance, Townsend Hoopes, the under secretary of the Air Force, had presented Secretary of State Clark Clifford in February 1968 with a strategy for “staying the course for an added number of grinding years” by concentrating merely on controlling populated areas. But the phrase became even more important later on as a hawkish slogan to explain the U.S. defeat. This happened after the noted journalist Stewart Alsop recalled in his memoir, *Stay of Execution*, published in 1973, that Winston Churchill had stated in his presence: “America. A great and powerful country. Like some strong horse

pulling the rest of the world up behind it out of the slough of despond, towards peace and prosperity. But will America stay the course?"<sup>6</sup> Vietnam hawks like Democratic Senator Henry M. Jackson turned to Churchill's question at every opportunity—insisting that the United States had failed to stay the course in Vietnam and should not make this mistake again.<sup>7</sup>

So powerful has this right-wing, military understanding of the Vietnam War become that it is now a force to reckon with in the current war in Iraq. Thus when President George W. Bush declared with respect to Iraq in April 2004 that "We've got to stay the course and we will stay the course," his Democratic opponent Senator John Kerry echoed that the United States should "stay the course" in Iraq, adding that "Americans differ about whether and how we should have gone to war. But it would be unthinkable now for us to retreat in disarray and leave behind a society deep in strife and dominated by radicals."<sup>8</sup>

### *The Road to Ruin in Iraq*

This repeated insistence on staying the course is sometimes reduced to a mere willingness to countenance continuing bloodshed. According to Max Boot:

Any nation bent on imperial policing will suffer a few setbacks. The British army, in the course of Queen Victoria's little wars, suffered major defeats with thousands of casualties in the First Afghan War (1842) and the Zulu War (1879). This did not appreciably dampen British determination to defend and expand the empire; it made them hunger for vengeance. If Americans cannot adopt a similarly bloody-minded attitude, then they have no business undertaking imperial policing.<sup>9</sup>

But adoption of a "bloody-minded attitude"—something that is not lacking at present in Washington—will not save the United States in Iraq. Despite the much proclaimed "victory" in Fallujah—where the level of destruction unleashed against a city in an already occupied country is probably unequaled in modern times—war planners are working overtime to find a way to stave off a defeat that appears increasingly likely. The most important recent treatment of the Iraq War from within the national security establishment has come from Anthony H. Cordesman, a long-time national security adviser for the Department of Defense, specializing in the Middle East and energy issues, who oversaw the assessment of the Yom Kippur War for the Defense Department in 1974. Cordesman is now a

Fellow in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington and the national security analyst for ABC News. In his report *"Playing the Course: A Strategy for Reshaping U.S. Policy in Iraq and the Middle East"* Cordesman argues that the United States should not "stay the course" if a pragmatic strategy for success, which he calls "playing the course," does not work. "The US faces too much Iraqi anger and resentment to try to hold on in the face of clear failure, and achieving any lasting success in terms of Iraqi political acceptance means that the US must seek to largely withdraw over the next two years." Moreover, given the degree of U.S. failure so far the question of a U.S. defeat in Iraq needs to be considered. "The odds of lasting US success in Iraq," he states, "are now at best even, and may well be worse. The US can almost certainly win every military battle and clash, but it is far less certain to win the political and economic war."<sup>10</sup>

Cordesman believes that the United States can only save itself from a clear defeat and the resulting loss of "face" in Iraq by renouncing at once all imperial objectives. As he declared in an interview for the Council on Foreign Relations in late November: "We've never said to the Iraqis that we won't take their oil, that we won't steal their economy, that we won't establish military bases, that we'll leave when an elected government asks us to. We've never said that any government that is elected is OK with us." As he writes in *Playing the Course*, the United States should "conspicuously" abandon the following objectives: (1) using "Iraq as a tool or lever for changing the region"; (2) using Iraq as "a US military base"; (3) interfering with "Iraq's independence in terms of its politics, economics, and above all oil"; and (4) blocking "total transparency" in the U.S. relation to the Iraqi economy. U.S. assurances he insists must include its explicit commitment to withdraw entirely from the Green Zone in Baghdad, which cannot be maintained as an imperial headquarters in a supposedly independent Iraq.

The United States, Cordesman advises, should narrow its objectives to the creation of a stable government backed up by an adequate Iraqi military force—even if the new political regime is only moderately better than that of Saddam Hussein and even if openly antagonistic to the United States. If Washington can "succeed" even to this extent, he says, it can declare "victory" and get out within two years with a minimum amount of damage to its credibility as an imperial power. However, in case it should fail to create a stable political solution or to create an adequate Iraqi army within that period—as now appears most likely—the United States needs to start making plans immediately for what it will do in the

case of a clear defeat. "Even 'victory' in Iraq," we are told, "will be highly relative, and defeat," which can occur in any number of ways as Iraq spins out of control, "will force the US to reinforce its position in the entire region."

Even more important than the formation of a stable regime, from Cordesman's standpoint, is the replacement of U.S. with Iraqi forces. "Iraqization," he writes, "either has to be made to work, or Iraq will become a mirror image of the failure of 'Vietnamization' in Vietnam: Coalition military victories will become increasingly irrelevant." After a detailed assessment of Iraqi forces and training he concludes: "the Iraq military and security forces are now far too weak to take over the security mission and will almost certainly remain so well into 2005. ... The US can only 'play the course' effectively if it works out goals and plans with the Iraqi Interim Government that go far beyond the 28,000 man [Iraqi] armed forces—and the roughly 40–55,000 man total of military, paramilitary, and National Guard—the US currently says are 'required.'"

The truth is that the presence of 150,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, which has stretched available U.S. forces to the limit, has not been enough, even when supplemented by troops from Britain, to bring the country to heel. "The US has already learned that it can win virtually any direct military battle or clash, but it cannot secure the country. ... As in Vietnam, if the interim Iraqi government cannot win the political battle, U.S. victories in the military battles become irrelevant." Given the political turmoil in Iraq and the difficulty of creating any political solution, or even avoiding the outbreak of civil war, Cordesman believes that the United States needs to concentrate on how to shore up its position in the remainder of the Middle East in the event of a defeat:

Fighting a counterinsurgency campaign is one thing; the US must not stay if Iraq devolves into civil war. ... No one can guarantee success in Iraq; or that Iraq will not descend into civil war, come under a strongman, or split along ethnic or confessional lines. ... [I]t is one thing to play the game and quite another to try to deal with defeat by reinforcing failure or "doubling the bet." If it is clear by 2006 that the US cannot win with its current level of effort, and/or the situation serious[ly] deteriorates to the point where it is clear there is no new Iraq government and security force to aid, the game is over. There no longer is time to fold; it is time to run.<sup>11</sup>

If forced "to run," he says, the United States will have to offer reassurances to the rulers of the "friendly Gulf states and other Arab allies." It will have to prevent

any expansion of Islamic jihad in Afghanistan resulting from Islamic declarations of "victory" in Iraq. At the same time the United States will have to keep Iran from intervening in Iraq. More pressure than ever will be placed on the United States to solve the Israeli-Palestinian problem. Finally, the threat to U.S. strategic position with respect to Middle Eastern oil will have to be planned for, requiring that the United States not withdraw from the Middle East but if anything step up its involvement.

Cordesman leaves no doubt that the major issue for the United States in Iraq as in the Middle East as a whole is oil. Continual attacks on the oil pipelines by the Iraqi resistance have limited the flow of oil from Iraq, undermining one of the principal U.S. objectives, and highlighting the overall U.S. failure. In the event of a clear defeat and a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, the oil situation will become even more critical. "The US," Cordesman writes "can and must find substitutes for petroleum, but this will take decades. In the interim, the US and the global economy will actually become steadily more dependent on energy imports, and particularly on energy imports from the Gulf." By the end of 2025 the industrialized countries alone, according to estimates by the U.S. Energy Information Agency (EIA) in its *International Energy Outlook* of 2004, are expected to increase their petroleum imports from OPEC by an additional 11.5 million barrels a day beyond the 16.1 million barrels a day in 2001, with the Persian Gulf supplying more than half of the increase. North American imports from the Persian Gulf are expected to double over the period. Meanwhile, demand for oil from China and other developing countries is expected to increase dramatically. The strategic importance of oil for the world economy will accelerate accordingly.

In order to meet this demand for additional production, the EIA estimated that a further \$1.5 trillion would have to be invested in the Middle East between 2003 and 2030. The long-term potential for investment in the expansion of production in Iraq is greater than elsewhere since many oil analysts and institutes (for instance the Baker Institute, Center for Global Energy Studies, and the Federation of American Scientists) believe that, in addition to its proven reserves of 115 billion barrels of oil, Iraq may have, in the 90 percent of its territory that remains unexplored, 100 billion barrels or more of additional oil reserves. (Estimates coming from some agencies, like the U.S. Geological Survey, are less optimistic, with median estimates of additional Iraqi reserves at 45 billion barrels.) According to Cordesman it is the enormous level of investment necessary for the expansion of Middle East oil production, which must occur in order to



ensure adequate supplies for future consumption, that is the most pressing "practical problem" presented by the Persian Gulf from the standpoint of the global economy. Not only must such investments be made but they must then be protected. In this regard it would not be easy for the United States to pull out completely from Iraq or to refrain from stepping up its involvement elsewhere in the Middle East if compelled to leave that country.

Relative to most analyses emanating from national security circles in the United States, Cordesman's *Playing the Course* has the advantage of being strong on realism. It is therefore reasonable to ask whether the powers that be in the United States can be expected to follow his prescription, beginning by renouncing all imperial objectives in Iraq. This is unlikely to happen. The operational phrase remains to "stay the course." On March 30, 2004, former secretary of defense under Nixon and Ford, James Schlesinger, and former U.S. ambassador to Russia and under secretary for political affairs under Clinton, Thomas Pickering editorialized in the *Los Angeles Times* that Iraq should remain "above politics" and that the United States should "stay the course." The reasons they offered included preventing Iran from influencing Iraq; guaranteeing "long-term stability in the production and supply of oil"; blocking the rise of a new power in Iraq opposed to the United States; and avoiding a perception of American defeat that would serve to destabilize American power and its interests both in the Middle East and globally. In short, the imperial objectives for which the United States intervened in the region must be maintained at all costs.

Nothing coming out of Washington these days suggests that this dominant view has altered in any way. Although it is well understood among those at the top of the social hierarchy that a series of disasters may well await the United States in Iraq if it simply sticks to its guns, to not do so is seen as guaranteeing a still bigger disaster—a confession of defeat that will diminish the future U.S. capacity to make war at will on third world societies and thus to employ force directly as a means to promote its imperial designs. Moreover, there is still the question of Iraqi oil and who will control it. Thus in the ruling class view, even an absolute failure in establishing a stable political regime and the requisite military force to defend it in Iraq does not necessarily mean that the United States should get out. Thomas Friedman, columnist on foreign affairs at the *New York Times*, whose views can usually be taken as a good barometer of establishment opinion, concludes a November 18, 2004, report from Iraq with the statement that "Without a secure environment in which its new leadership can be elected and comfortably

operate, Iraq will never be able to breathe on its own, and U.S. troops will have to be here forever." The attitude here is that the U.S. occupation would need to continue endlessly in the case of a failure to realize the goal of a stable political situation in Iraq acceptable to the United States. Given the enormous Iraqi oil reserves Washington could decide that whatever costs it had to pay in Iraq would be amply rewarded in the end.

If the foregoing reading of the U.S. leadership's current determination to stay the course is right, then the failures to be experienced by U.S. imperialism in Iraq are likely to persist and be all the greater. The continuing presence of U.S. troops will mean that the U.S. military will continue to take its bloody toll (which has already descended to systematic torture and the reintroduction of napalm, outlawed by the United Nations in 1980), and Iraqi opposition to the American "liberators" will only grow. Meanwhile any Iraqi government that is elected under these circumstances will either have to be opposed to the U.S. occupation or lose any claims of legitimacy within Iraqi society. The U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq may be creating the conditions for a civil war, lighting a powder keg under the entire Middle East. To get an idea of just how serious this can be one has only to look at present Israeli arming and training of the Kurdish militias, with the object of then setting them—if the need should arise—against the Shiite or Sunni forces in Iraq. Israel's possession of hundreds of nuclear weapons poses the continual threat of the "Samson option" should that government perceive itself or its occupation of Palestine as seriously threatened.<sup>12</sup>

Wider speculation at this point would be foolhardy. But there is no doubt that in invading Iraq the United States opened the doors of hell not only for the Iraqis and the Middle East as a whole but also for its own global imperialist order. The full repercussions of the failure of the U.S. empire in Iraq have yet to be seen and will only become evident in the months and years ahead.

# Notes

## *Preface*

1. Robert Kaplan, *Imperial Grunts: The American Military on the Ground* (New York: Random House, 2005), 3–15.

## *Introduction*

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2. Deepak Lal, *In Praise of Empires* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 99.
3. *New York Times*, May 10, 2003.
4. Michael Ignatieff, "The Challenges of American Imperial Power," *Naval War College Review* LVI:2, Spring 2003. [www.nwc.navy.mil/press/Review/2003/Spring/art3-sp3.htm](http://www.nwc.navy.mil/press/Review/2003/Spring/art3-sp3.htm)
5. *New York Times*, April 27, 2003.
6. Michael Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (London: Verso, 2003), 252, 267.
7. Boot, "American Imperialism?"
8. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 178–179.
9. Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 177.
10. See transcript of Saddam Hussein's statement and U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie's response, *New York Times International*, September 23, 1990.
11. Research Unit for Political Economy, *Behind the Invasion of Iraq* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003).
12. *New York Times Magazine*, March 28, 1999.
13. *New York Times*, March 8, 1992.
14. Project for the New American Century, *Rebuilding America's Defenses, Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century*, September 2000. Online link is: [www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf](http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf)
15. István Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), 37.
16. Robert S. McNamara, "Apocalypse Soon," *Foreign Policy* 148 (May/June 2005), 29.

## *1. After the Attack ... the War on Terrorism*

1. See Ellen C. Collier, *Instances of Use of United States Forces Abroad, 1798-1993*, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, CRS Issue Brief, October 7, 1993.

Available online at: [www.fas.org/man/crs/crs\\_931007.htm](http://www.fas.org/man/crs/crs_931007.htm). The Congressional Research Service lists sixty-six instances of the employment of U.S. military forces abroad over the period 1945–1993 (245 over the period 1978–1993). This list can be updated for the last eight years, bringing the total since 1945 to over seventy.

2. Quoted in *Toronto Star*, April 9, 1991. See also David N. Gibbs, “Washington’s New Interventionism,” *Monthly Review* 53: 4 (September 2001), 15–37.
3. István Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), 23.
4. \*This section was drafted by Robert W. McChesney.
5. Amnesty International, *The United States of America: Rights for All* (London: Amnesty International 1998). See especially chapters 7 and 8. [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org).

## 2. Imperialism and “Empire”

1. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xii.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, 9.
4. *Ibid.*, 333.
5. *Ibid.*, 335. Hardt and Negri refer to the work of Samir Amin, especially to his *Empire of Chaos* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992), as the leading alternative view of imperialism/empire to their own—one that differs sharply on the issue of center/periphery. See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 9, 14, 334, 467.
6. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xiii–xiv.
7. *Ibid.*, 178, 179.
8. *Ibid.*, 180.
9. *Ibid.*, 182.
10. *Ibid.*, 407.
11. István Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001) and István Mészáros, *Beyond Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995).
12. Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism*, 10–11.
13. *Ibid.*, 13.
14. This is an abbreviated and slightly modified version of Mészáros’ list of principal contradictions.
15. *Ibid.*, 13–14.
16. *Ibid.*, 19, 61.
17. *Ibid.*, 51.
18. *Ibid.*, 28–29.
19. The U.S. strategy of establishing global hegemony through the global projection of its military power is examined in detail in David N. Gibbs, “Washington’s New Interventionism: U.S. Hegemony and Interimperialist Rivalries,” *Monthly Review* 53: 4 (September 2001), 5–37.
20. Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism*, 37–38.
21. *Ibid.*, 40.
22. *Ibid.*, 73.
23. The Editors, “Pox Americana,” *Monthly Review* 43: 3 (July–August 1991), 13.

### 3. *Monopoly Capitalism and the New Globalization*

1. The *New York Times* was encapsulating the views of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their fashionable, postmodernist work, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
2. *Communist Manifesto* quoted in *World Development Report, 1996* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.
3. Adam Smith, Book 4, Section 9.
4. Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1999), 94.
5. Much of the discussion in this and the following paragraphs draws on Paul M. Sweezy, "Monopoly Capitalism," *New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, vol. 3 (New York: The Stockton Press, 1987), 541-544.
6. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1977), 777f.
7. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, chapter 27.
8. Arthur R. Burns, *The Decline of Competition: A Study of the Evolution of American Industry* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936).
9. Michal Kalecki, *Theory of Economic Dynamics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965), 161.
10. Michal Kalecki, *Essays in the Theory of Economic Fluctuations* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1939), 149.
11. The monopoly capitalist economy does not consist simply of giant firms, of course. Within manufacturing, for example, there are hundreds of thousands of firms, which together employ a substantial share of the work force. These smaller firms are often attached to the giants, some supplying parts, others occupying various other niches. Such firms tend to bear the brunt of an economic downturn. Conversely, during an expansion they tend to grow more rapidly than the dominant, monopolistic firms.
12. For a detailed discussion of Sweezy's views, from which part of this analysis is taken, see John Bellamy Foster, "Paul Marlor Sweezy," in Philip Aresits and Malcolm Sawyer, eds., *A Bibliographical Dictionary of Dissenting Economists* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2000), 642-651.
13. Josef Steindl, *Maturity and Stagnation in American Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).
14. For a more thorough treatment of Baran's work, from which some of the present discussion is adapted, see John Bellamy Foster, "Paul Alexander Baran," in Aresits and Sawyer, *Bibliographical Dictionary of Dissenting Economists*, 36-43.
15. Paul A. Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957), 136.
16. *Ibid.*, 142.
17. Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966).
18. Joanne Barkan, "A Blast from the Past: Paul Baran and Paul M. Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital*," *Dissent* 44 (Spring 1997), 95.
19. Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, 3.
20. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

21. A fuller account of Braverman's ideas can be found in John Bellamy Foster, "Introduction," in Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), ix-xxvii.
22. Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism: The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969.)
23. For a more extensive treatment of Magdoff's life and work, from which part of the present discussion has been drawn, see John Bellamy Foster, "Harry Magdoff," in Artesius and Sawyer, *Bibliographical Dictionary of Dissenting Economists*, 385-94.
24. A similar view, emanating from the third world, was presented in Samir Amin's pathbreaking work, *Accumulation on a World Scale. A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974). First written as a dissertation in 1957.
25. Magdoff, *Age of Imperialism*, 200.
26. Harry Magdoff, *Globalization—To What End?* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992), 3.
27. Paul M. Sweezy, *Four Lectures on Marxism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981), 73.
28. Magdoff, *Globalization—To What End?*, 4-5.
29. István Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 51-2.
30. Paul M. Sweezy, "More (or Less) on Globalization," *Monthly Review*, 49:4 (September 1997), 1-4.

#### 4. U.S. Military Bases and Empire

1. Arnold Toynbee, *America and the World Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 105-6.
2. Robert Harkavy, *Great Power Competition for Overseas Bases* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982).
3. James R. Blaker, *United States Overseas Basing* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 9, 37. The research for Blaker's seminal study was supported by the Office of the Secretary of Defense. On the data provided in that study it should be noted that there is no agreed definition of what constitutes a military base, so calculation as to numbers is difficult. Blaker defines a military base site as an installation "routinely used" by military forces. All installations within a twenty-five mile radius are classified as part of a single base site associated with the nearest town or city; installations that are more than twenty-five miles apart are seen as different base sites. Installations and base sites are demarcated primarily on the basis of data on the capital value of facilities.
4. Quoted in C.T. Sanders, *America's Overseas Garrisons: The Leasehold Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.
5. Blaker, *United States Overseas Basing*, 32.
6. Subcommittee on Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, *Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad*, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, December 21, 1970, 19-20.
7. Report of the Secretary of Defense, 1989, 41.
8. Quoted in Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 249. Two years before Bush senior declared the Vietnam Syndrome dead, Paul Sweezy had written in this space: "Prior to Vietnam, the U.S. ruling

class had taken it for granted that the people of the country would be willing to fight any wars that the defense of its imperial interests would require: such, after all, had been the essential precondition throughout the ages for the viability of empires. But Vietnam proved, at least in the case of the United States in the late twentieth century, that this was no longer true. This new situation has been given a name, the Vietnam Syndrome, and has come to play an increasingly important part in the history of our time." Paul M. Sweezy, "U.S. Imperialism in the 1990s," *Monthly Review* (October 1989), 41:5, 6.

9. *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 2002.
10. Report of the Secretary of Defense, 1996, 13-4
11. This estimate of the number of countries in which U.S. bases are located cannot be directly compared to the figures provided in Blaker's study referred to above, since the latter includes only bases recorded by the Defense Department in its lists of installations (based on capitalization value), while we have also included here: (1) bases not listed in the Pentagon's *Base Structure Report*, but housing substantial numbers of U.S. troops; (2) bases in U.S. territories/possessions outside the fifty states and the District of Columbia (viewing these as essentially outside the United States); and (3) recently acquired forward operating locations in strategic areas (mainly in the Middle East, South/Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean). Nevertheless, the figures here, though not strictly comparable to the earlier ones provided, suggest that the geographical spread of U.S. bases has not contracted since the end of the Korean War (and probably not since the end of the Vietnam War) and is now in a phase of renewed expansion.
12. *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 2002.
13. Unocal's testimony is reprinted in "A New Silk Road: Proposed Pipeline in Afghanistan," *Monthly Review*, December 2001. The history of Unocal's Central Asian pipeline project is discussed in detail in Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 151-80.
14. Subcommittee on Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, *Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad*, 20.
15. Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 64
16. John Lindsay-Poland, "U.S. Military Bases in Latin America and the Caribbean," *Foreign Policy in Focus* 6 (October 2001) [www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org](http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org).
17. Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 205.

### 5. *The Rediscovery of Imperialism*

1. Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), p. 148.
2. *New York Times Magazine*, July 28, 2002.
3. G. John Ikenberry, "America's Imperial Ambition," *Foreign Affairs* 81: 5 (September-October 2002), 44.
4. Boot, Brzezinski, Kaplan, Kissinger, Mallaby, and Rosen are quoted in Philip S. Golub, "The Dynamics of World Disorder: Westward in the Course of Empire," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, English internet edition (September 2002). [mondediplo.com](http://mondediplo.com)

- com/2002/09/03westward. See also Martin Walker, "America's Virtual Empire," *World Policy Journal* 19: 2 (Summer 2002), 13-20.
5. Charles A. Conant, *The United States in the Orient* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), 29-30.
  6. J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 80f.
  7. V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), 88.
  8. *Ibid.*, 182.
  9. Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism. The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).
  10. *Ibid.*, 53f.
  11. Magdoff, *Imperialism*, 261.
  12. The clearest example of this is Steven J. Rosen and James R. Kurth, *Testing Theories of Economic Imperialism* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1974). In a critical essay in that volume, Harry Magdoff concluded that an "analytical framework" that "put into separate compartments key aspects of the imperialist problem that are in fact inseparable" was mistaken. "The attempt at clear-cut differentiation of military, political, and economic issues leads to ignoring what is most essential: the interdependence and mutual interaction of these factors. This way of thinking—including the use of the "national interest" abstraction—is quite traditional in orthodox social science, a fact which goes far to account for its historic inability to face to either the growth and significance of imperialism or to [the new] imperialism's roots in monopoly capitalism." Magdoff in *Ibid.*, 86.
  13. Prabhat Patnaik, "Whatever Happened to Imperialism?" *Monthly Review* 42: 6 (November 1990), 1-6.
  14. *Ibid.*
  15. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 180.
  16. *New York Times*, September 5, 2002.
  17. This section was drafted by Harry Magdoff.
  18. This information is for 1992, the latest year for which this kind of information is available. The \$2 Limit is based on purchasing power parity. That means that the data are adjusted so as to determine what amount of given bundle of consumer goods could be bought for \$2, eliminating to the extent feasible the effect of differences between prices from country to country.
  19. This data is taken from the World Bank's tables on income distribution—in recent editions of the *World Development Report* entitled "Poverty and Income Distribution." In calculating percentage shares of income distribution the World Bank relies on household surveys of income or expenditures compiled by the various countries. In order to ensure that the data is comparable the World Bank staff uses whenever possible household expenditures rather than income data. In the case of India the data referred to is based on per capita household expenditures. World Bank, *World Development Report*, 1990, 1996, 2003 editions.
  20. Depending on the available data, World Bank economists will calculate the distribution of income either by revenue or consumption.



### 6. *U.S. Imperial Ambitions and Iraq*

1. Recently the Bush administration has also said that "regime change" could be stretched to include an Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein that cooperates fully with U.N. inspections and disarmament, in terms acceptable to the United States. But the administration has declared this to be highly improbable, and its position in this respect can thus be interpreted as part of a diplomatic-legal strategy to garner support for its threatened invasion, in the event that Iraq is declared to be non-compliant with the U.N. inspection process.
2. Thorstein Veblen, *Essays in Our Changing Order* (New York: Viking Press, 1934), p. 464.
3. Noam Chomsky, "The Cold War and the Superpowers," *Monthly Review* 33:6 (November 1981), 1f.
4. Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism. The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).
5. Jay Bookman, "The President's Real Goal in Iraq," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 29, 2002.
6. Joseph Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes*, edited and introduced by Paul M. Sweezy (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1951), 66.
7. Of course for many (if not most) of the imperial adventures of the nineteenth century there was never much latitude for pretending that the motives were defensive. The Opium Wars were fought not against an aggressive China, but rather to impose free trade in opium. The struggle amongst the European powers to divide up Africa was not directed against a belligerent Africa but rationalized as the "white man's burden."
8. *New York Times*, September 20, 2002.
9. *New York Times*, October 7, 2002.
10. *New York Times*, October 14, 2002.
11. *New York Times*, October 10, 2002.
12. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, *United States Dual-Use Exports to Iraq and their Impact on the Health of the Persian Gulf War Veterans*, 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., May 25, 1994, 264-76; *Buffalo News*, September 23, 2002.
13. *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 3, 2002.
14. See William Rivers Pitt with Scott Ritter, *War on Iraq* (New York: Context Books, 2002); *Newsday*, July 30, 2002; *The Guardian*, October 7, 2002.
15. [www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iraq.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iraq.html); *Middle East Report*, Fall 2002; *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 29, 2002.
16. Edward L. Morse and James Richard, "The Battle for Energy Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 81: 2 (March/April 2002).
17. Quoted in Bookman, "The President's Real Goal."
18. *New York Times*, October 22, 2002.
19. G. John Ikenberry, "America's Imperial Ambition," *Foreign Affairs* 81: 5 (September-October 2002).

### 7. *"Imperial America" and War*

1. Richard N. Haass, *Imperial America*. Online: [www.brook.edu](http://www.brook.edu).
2. *New York Times Magazine*, January 5, 2003.

3. John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review*, second series, 6: 1 (1953), 1-15.
4. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 369f.
5. V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), 85.
6. Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?: Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001)
7. "It's Not 'All About Oil,' but . . .," *Business Week Online*, February 10, 2003.
8. Richard Haass, *Intervention: the Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World* (Washington, DC : Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994).
9. Richard Haass, *Intervention: The Use of Military Force*, 84.
10. Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism: From the Colonial Age to the Present* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 139.
11. Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism without Colonies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003), 68.

### 8. *The New Age of Imperialism*

1. John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: James Nisbet, 1902).
2. *Economist*, April 26, 2003.
3. Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism: The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).
4. This argument was succinctly expressed in Paul Baran and Paul M. Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966), 183-202.
5. Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism*, 16.
6. Robert W. Tucker, *The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 28.
7. *Ibid.*, 131.
8. Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *The Imperial Temptation: The New World Order and America's Purpose* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992), 14-5.
9. *Ibid.*, 147.
10. *Ibid.*, 10-11.
11. Richard Haass, *Intervention: the Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), 8.
12. *New York Times*, March 8, 1992.
13. Richard Haass, " *The Reluctant Sheriff: The United States After the Cold War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1997), 54.
14. Haass, *The Reluctant Sheriff*, 93.
15. www.brook.edu. For a more detailed discussion of Haass' "Imperial America" argument see chapter 7 above.
16. Quoted in Michael Hirsh, *At War with Ourselves: Why America is Squandering its Chance to Build a Better World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 251.

17. Project for the New American Century, *Rebuilding America's Defenses*, September 2000.
18. For a treatment of how U.S. and NATO intervention in the Yugoslavian civil wars came to be seen in terms of a larger imperialist project see Diana Johnstone, *Fool's Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO, and Western Delusions* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002.)
19. Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
20. Hirsh, *At War with Ourselves*, 245.
21. *Ibid.*, 235.
22. Council on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: The Day After* (New York, 2003), 48.
23. Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism*.
24. Council on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: The Day After*, 48–9.
25. “Prison Industry Goes Global,” [www.futurenet.org](http://www.futurenet.org), fall 2000.
26. István Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001)

### 9. Kipling, the “White Man’s Burden,” and U.S. Imperialism

1. Jonathan Marcus, “US Faces Up to Guerrilla War,” BBCNews, July 17, 2003 ([news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk)).
2. The following brief historical treatment of the Philippine-American War draws mainly on these works: Henry F. Graff, ed., *American Imperialism and the Philippine Insurrection: Testimony Taken from Hearings on Affairs in the Philippine Islands before the Senate Committee on the Philippines—1902* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969); Angel Velasco Shaw and Luis H. Francia, *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899–1999* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1972), and “How the Philippine-U.S. War Began,” *Monthly Review* 51:4 (September 1999); Stuart Creighton Miller, *“Benevolent Assimilation”: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899–1903* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); and Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom, *The Philippines Reader* (Boston: South End Press, 1987).
3. The poem is often reproduced without the subtitle. For a correct version see *Kipling’s Verse: Definitive Edition* (New York: Doubleday, 1940).
4. Although a quarter of the million is the “consensual” figure of historians, estimates of Filipino deaths from the war have ranged as high as one million, which would have meant depopulation of the islands by around one-sixth.
5. MacArthur quoted in Miller, *“Benevolent Assimilation,”* p. 94.
6. Jim Zwick, ed., *Mark Twain’s Weapons of Satire* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 172.
7. For information on the Moro massacre and the W. E. B. Du Bois quote see [www.boondocksnet.com/ai/ail/noro.htm](http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/ail/noro.htm). Jim Zwick’s boondocksnet.com website is a crucial source for materials on the Philippine-American War, contemporary responses to Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden,” and Mark Twain’s anti-imperialist writings.
8. The Nobel committee was, however, mainly impressed by Kipling’s sympathy for the Boers in South Africa—another population of white colonizers.

9. John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 289.
10. V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), 15.
11. *Wall Street Journal*, July 15, 2003.
12. *New York Times Magazine*, September 7, 2003.
13. Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
14. *New York Times Magazine*, July 28, 2002.
15. Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 369f.
16. This call upon white elites to divide the world evoked a response beyond Britain and the United States. The admiration of Kipling among the ruling classes at the center of the capitalist world was more general. As Hobsbawm tells us: "When the writer Rudyard Kipling, the bard of the Indian empire, was believed to be dying of pneumonia in 1899, not only the British and the Americans grieved—Kipling had just addressed a poem on 'The White Man's Burden' to the USA on its responsibilities in the Philippines—but the Emperor of Germany sent a telegram." Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 82.

### 10. *Is Iraq Another "Vietnam"?*

1. Quoted in the *New York Times*, August 31, 1966.
2. Quoted in Harry Magdoff and Paul M. Sweezy, "The War Spreads," *Monthly Review* 22:1 (May 1970).
3. Council on Foreign Relations, *Iraq: One Year Later*, (Washington, DC, March 9, 2004), 13.
4. *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 2004.
5. *Business Week*, April 26, 2004.
6. Bruce Nussbaum, "Iraq: A Most Dangerous Moment," *Business Week*, April 26, 2004, 37f; Bruce Nussbaum, "It's Time to Reshelve the Rumsfeld Doctrine," *Business Week*, April 26, 2004, 40f.
7. *New York Times*, April 25, 2004.
8. *Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 2004.
9. Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy, "Vietnam: What Next?," *Monthly Review* 21:7 (December 1969), 3-4.
10. "U.S. Weighs the Return of Military Conscription," *Toronto Star*, April 22, 2004.
11. [www.gregpalast.com](http://www.gregpalast.com).

### 11. *The U.S. Empire: Pax Americana or Pox Americana?*

1. John F. Kennedy, "Commencement Address at American University," June 10, 1963. [www.jfklibrary.org/jf061063.htm](http://www.jfklibrary.org/jf061063.htm); V. D. Sokolovskii, *Soviet Military Strategy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 149. Originally published in the Soviet Union in 1962 under the title *Military Strategy*. In his speech Kennedy substituted ellipses in the main part of the quotation offered here. Here we quote from the same passage, replacing the ellipses with the actual text.

2. Ronald Steel, *Pax Americana* (New York: Viking Press, 1967), 16–17, 268, 336.
3. Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy and the End of the Republic* (New York: Henry Holt, 2003), 1.
4. Steel, *Pax Americana*, 334.
5. Harry Magdoff and Paul M. Sweezy, “Pox Americana,” *Monthly Review* 43: 3 (July–August 1991), 1–13.
6. *Ibid.*

## 12. *Empire of Barbarism*

1. *Business Week*, September 20, 2004.
2. Jona Lendering, “The Edges of the Earth in Greek and Roman Thought,” [www.livius.org/ea-ch/edges/edges.html](http://www.livius.org/ea-ch/edges/edges.html).
3. Strabo, *Geography*, 4.1.14.
4. *Ibid.*, 1.1.17.
5. *Ibid.*, 4.1.12.
6. Charles Fourier, *The Social Destiny of Man, Or Theory of the Four Movements* (New York: R.M. Dewitt, 1857), 99.
7. Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 360, 218.
8. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol.6 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 434.
9. *Scientific American*, October 1971.
10. Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), 360; Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, 434 and vol. 34, 67.
11. Mike Davis, *Victorian Holocausts* (New York: Verso, 2001).
12. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1976), 916; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On Colonialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 86–8; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 316–7 (Marx to Danielson, February 19, 1881); Davis, *Victorian Holocausts*, 39. Marx and Engels did not use the term barbarism in a Eurocentric way. In the case of the wars between Christians and Moors in Spain it was the Christians who were characterized by Engels as the barbarians. *Collected Works*, vol. 25, 170.
13. Marx, *Early Writings*, 359–60; Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 25, 460–61.
14. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson, eds., *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 349–52, 364.
15. *Ibid.*, 313.
16. *Ibid.*, 8, 18, 124–27.
17. Ferguson, *Colossus*, 48–52, 267, 301–02; Ferguson, *Empire*, 369–70.
18. István Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 29.
19. *USA Today*, September 16, 2004.
20. *New York Times*, September 29, 2004.
21. *Lancet*, online edition, October 29, 2004.
22. *USA Today*, September 16, 2004.

23. *New York Times*, May 13, 2004.
24. *Final Report of the Independent Panel to Review DoD Detention Operations, August 2004*. [www.defenselink.mil/news/Aug2004/d20040824finalreport.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Aug2004/d20040824finalreport.pdf).
25. Marx and Engels, *On Colonialism*, 152-55, 162-67; Mark Tanner, "Abu Ghraib," *New York Review of Books*, October 7, 2004, 44-50; Edward Greer, "'We Don't Torture People in America,'" *New Political Science* 26: 3 (September 2004), 371-87.
26. "Après moi le déluge! is the watchword of every capitalist and of every capitalist nation. Capital therefore takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so." Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 381.
27. *USA Today*, September 16, 2004.
28. Daniel Singer, *Whose Millennium?: Theirs or Ours?* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 272.

### 13. *The Failure of Empire*

1. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol.1 (New York: Vintage, 1976), 915.
2. Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 107.
3. Michael Klare, "The New Geopolitics," in John Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney, ed., *Pox Americana* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 51-56.
4. For a critique of this new conservative/military history of the war see Robert Buzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).
5. General William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), 332-34, 404.
6. Stewart Alsop, *Stay of Execution* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1973), 73f.
7. *The Pentagon Papers*, vol. 4 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 668; Noam Chomsky, "Foreword" in Peter Linquenco and Peter Weiss, ed., *Prevent the Crime of Silence: Reports from the Sessions of the International War Crimes Tribunal founded by Bertrand Russell* (London: Penguin, 1971), 19; Dorothy Fosdick, ed., *Staying the Course: Henry M. Jackson and National Security* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), 190.
8. Robert Scheer, "Don't Stay the Course Senator," *Salon.com*, April 28, 2004; Evan Thomas, "The Vietnam Question," *MSNBC.com*, April 19, 2004.
9. Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 347.
10. Anthony H. Cordesman, "Playing the Course:" *A Strategy for Reshaping U.S. Policy in Iraq and the Middle East* (fourth draft, November 22, 2004); [www.CSIS.org](http://www.CSIS.org).
11. *Ibid.*
12. Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 356-60, and *The Samson Option: Israel's Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1991).

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