



# INCOHERENT EMPIRE

**V**





INCOHERENT EMPIRE



MICHAEL MANN



VERSO

London • New York

First published by Verso 2003  
© Michael Mann 2003

All rights reserved

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

**Verso**

UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1F 0EG  
USA: 180 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014-4606  
[www.versobooks.com](http://www.versobooks.com)

Verso is the imprint of New Left Books

ISBN 1-85984-582-7

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Typeset in Bembo by YHT Ltd, London  
Printed by

# CONTENTS

Preface

vii

Introduction: The New Imperialism

i

**ONE** THE MILITARY GIANT

18

**TWO** THE ECONOMIC BACKSEAT DRIVER

49

**THREE** THE POLITICAL SCHIZOPHRENIC

80

**FOUR** THE IDEOLOGICAL PHANTOM

100

**FIVE** THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

123

**SIX** THE WAR AGAINST (MUSLIM) TERRORISM

159

**SEVEN** THE WAR AGAINST ROGUE STATES AND NORTH KOREA

194

**EIGHT** IRAQ ATTACK

206

**NINE** THE NEW MILITARISM

252

Index

269



## PREFACE

For 20 years I have worked as a historical sociologist on the nature of power in human societies. I have written mostly on very “macro” subjects—on religions, economies, wars and states, throughout history and across the world. I have recently focused on the twin horrors of fascism and ethnic cleansing in the twentieth century. Though I have in the past written short pieces of contemporary political relevance, I have been mainly a scholar embedded inside the groves of academe.

But I have been stirred by current events and my own dual British/American citizenship into writing this book about world politics today, at breakneck speed. My two governments are currently threatening the peace and order of the world by pursuing extraordinarily foolhardy militaristic policies. Since I am a scholar and not an activist, this book does not denounce them with high moral rhetoric. Instead, I analyze and pick apart their “new imperialism,” armed with my general comparative knowledge of power and empires, militaries and clerics, and fanatics of all stripes. I hope to convince them—or at least you, the citizens and voters of various countries—that the United States has greatly exaggerated its powers, that it could found only a militaristic Empire, not a benevolent one, and that it will destroy very many lives, including American and British ones, before finally undermining the power of the United States. Of course, the two countries are on a very different scale. Since Bush is the imperial leader, Blair only the camp follower, I discuss here the American bid for Empire, with Britain only playing its walk-on part. For the sake of the world, it must be stopped.

I should like to thank the research assistance of Nicole Busse, Maria Dziembowski and Jamal Ali, who also provided invaluable translations

## VIII PREFACE

from the Arabic, and I thank John Hall, Nicky Hart and Ralph Schroeder for their support, advice and criticism. However, my greatest thanks must go to all those whistle-blowers, “leakers,” and independent-minded experts and journalists whose testimony I have been able to use to challenge the new imperialists.

# INTRODUCTION: THE NEW IMPERIALISM

Two presidential declarations, a decade apart:

We can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the real prospect of a new world order . . . in which the principles of justice and fair play . . . protect the weak against the strong. A world where the United Nations, freed from cold war stalemate, is poised to fulfill the historic vision of its founders. A world in which freedom and respect for humanity will find a home among nations. . . . Even the new world order cannot guarantee an era of perpetual peace. But enduring peace must be our mission.

We will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively . . . our best defense is a good offense. . . . We must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today's adversaries. . . . To forestall or prevent hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.

Father and son spoke, in March 1991 and September 2002. The father, President George Herbert Bush, spoke as the Soviet Union collapsed and immediately after his victory in the First Gulf War. The son, President George Walker Bush, spoke through his "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," issued as the US was embroiled in two wars (in Afghanistan and against terrorism) while covertly preparing a third (against Iraq).

Bush the Elder offered a vision of "enduring peace," to be achieved by US leadership, but together with allies and through the United Nations. The speech did not mention any future military action by the US. This was an optimistic and apparently multilateral vision of world order. Bush the Younger was much more pessimistic. He called for

## 2 INCOHERENT EMPIRE

“perpetual vigilance” against terrorists and wielders of weapons of mass destruction. Faced with “hostile acts,” he said the US would act militarily, preemptively and on its own. Allies, he suggested, are only ad hoc and temporary. The United Nations is mentioned only in the same breath as the WTO and NATO. This is a unilateralist and militarist vision of how to overcome world disorder. It is the new imperialism. The world should know that the present United States government embraces the new imperialism. Do not think that US policy toward Kyoto, land-mines, Star Wars, Iraq, Iran or the Southern Philippines are ad hoc or unconnected. They are all part of the grand strategy for a global American Empire, first envisioned as theory, then after 9-11 becoming reality.

The vision is embraced by the majority of the top officials running US foreign policy. Most of them have a long track record as hawkish neo-conservatives. While Defense Secretary in 1989, Vice-President Dick Cheney had argued that since Gorbachev’s Soviet reforms were only cosmetic, the US should not deal with the Soviets but keep up the cold-war and arms-race pressure. Through the 1990s he opposed withdrawing any nuclear weapons from Europe and South Korea, and asked for studies of new theater nuclear weapons to be used against Iraq and North Korea. Throughout the 1990s Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, now the Defense Secretary, urged overthrowing Saddam Hussein by force. In 1998, together with about 20 others, all now holding senior posts under Bush the Younger, they called for “a determined program to change the regime in Baghdad.” The same year Rumsfeld said that since “rogue states” would be able to deploy nuclear weapons “with little or no warning” in “about five years’ time,” “preemptive strikes” should be made against them. In 2000 he said the US should also weaponize space in order to prevent a “space Pearl Harbor.”

In 1992 Rumsfeld’s deputy at Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, together with other members of the present administration, authored a “Defense Planning Guidance” draft which was leaked to the *New York Times*. It advised “detering potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role.” Remarkably, these included not only Russia and China but also “the advanced industrial nations,” that is allies. As a Lebanese journalist was later to notice, Rumsfeld’s attempts to split Europe, with his talk of “old” and “new” Europe, was not a passing phrase or slip of the tongue. It derived straight from this document.<sup>1</sup> The document also advocated “military steps” for preventing others developing weapons of mass destruction or blocking access to vital raw

materials. It was completely silent on action through the UN and suggested all alliances were only temporary and military. Such an inflammatory document was hastily repudiated by President Bush the Elder, who released a far blander one. Yet it was clearly influencing American strategic planning.

The top officials were extreme on other issues too. Douglas Feith, now Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, worked to stop the ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention, negotiated by Bush the Elder. Together with Richard Perle, now Chairman of the Defense Policy Board, he urged Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to “make a clean break” with the Oslo Peace Accords and reassert Israel’s claim to the West Bank and Gaza by force. Feith wrote “the price in blood would be high, but it would be a necessary form of detoxification—the only way out of Oslo’s web.”

J.D. Crouch, now Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security, advocated a first strike on North Korea’s nuclear plants and missiles. John Bolton is the current Undersecretary for Arms Control and International Affairs, and so an important mole hawk, in the State Department. Hostile to the UN, in 1999 he attacked what he called “Kofi Annan’s power grab,” by which he meant Annan’s request that UN forces should take the primary role in peacekeeping operations. Bolton declared, “If the United States allows that claim to go unchallenged, its discretion in using force to advance its national interests is likely to be inhibited in the future.” He pronounced, “There is no such thing as the United Nations” and declared that if the top 16 stories fell off the UN building in New York, the world would be no worse off. At least he had a sense of humor.

In September 2000 Wolfowitz, Bolton and at least five others now holding senior positions in the White House or Department of Defense co-authored “Rebuilding America’s Defenses” a report for the conservative think-tank, the Project for the New American Century. They urged reneging on the anti-ballistic missile treaty, developing theater nuclear warheads to attack underground bunkers, targeting weapons against Iran, Iraq and North Korea, and a 24 percent increase in military spending. They added that the world required American not UN leadership. All this has now come to pass.

We see the long-maturing militarist and unilateralist bent of these hawks. Only the more cautious Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and his deputy Richard Armitage, seem to deviate much. “It’s nice to say we can do it unilaterally,” Powell told President Bush the Younger,

#### 4 INCOHERENT EMPIRE

“except you can’t.” Unfortunately for Powell, though his boss had shown no prior knowledge of foreign policy, he proved an instinctive imperialist. In his first two years in office, Powell was brought to heel. Complaining that European leaders wanted lots of consultations, Bush said, “You hold a coalition together by strong leadership and that’s what we intend to provide.” He revels in his reputation abroad as “the toxic Texan” and declared, “I will seize the opportunity to achieve big goals,” adding, “we’re never going to get people all in agreement about the use of force. . . . But action—confident action that will yield positive results provides kind of a slipstream into which reluctant nations and leaders can get behind.” This was a man who wanted to act first, and consult with foreigners not at all.<sup>2</sup> He was raring for action. Like the others, he was actually a “chicken-hawk,” a hawk who had never actually seen military action or its terrible consequences. Like the others, he would become a desk-killer, giving orders resulting in the deaths of thousands from the security of his office.

The actions of his administration were immediately clear. The post of US Ambassador to the UN was downgraded from Cabinet rank, and filled with John Negroponte, a man whose diplomatic record as ambassador in Honduras had included repeated condoning of human rights violations by US client regimes in Central America. The US withdrew from a series of international treaties, refusing to renew or sign up to the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention and the International Criminal Court; and it diluted a UN agreement to limit the small-arms trade. It will not sign the treaty banning land-mines (US forces took mines to Iraq). It denounced some of these agreements on the grounds that they lacked real teeth, but it opposed strengthening them since this would involve inspection of its own weapons systems, which was unacceptable “for reasons of national security.” Almost all of this was developing well before 9-11, with almost no mention of terrorism.

They already possessed the will, and action had begun. But the new imperialism was very removed from the lives of ordinary Americans, who had shown almost zero interest in foreign policy. Before 2001 the half-hour “world news” programs of the main American television networks typically contained only one foreign news item, compared to ten domestic ones. Few Americans would be interested in Empire. Insofar as the withdrawals from the Kyoto or biological weapons treaties attracted attention, most comments were critical. This was not how the

most informed Americans wanted their country to be represented in the world outside.

9-11 changed all that. Quite understandably, the terrible events of that day produced shock, anger and a cry for vengeance, emotions with which much of the world sympathized. The new imperialists were able to seize on this to induce Americans into global adventures for which they would have otherwise lacked interest. According to Wolfowitz, a meeting immediately after 9-11 discussed at length whether to attack Afghanistan or Iraq first. The Afghan chicken-hawks narrowly won. But in his State of the Union address in January 2002 President Bush widened the combat zone. Already engaged in a war on Afghanistan, he made two further declarations of war. One was “the war against terrorism.”<sup>3</sup> He said evidence from Afghanistan revealed that

thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning . . . tens of thousands of trained terrorists are still at large. These enemies view the entire world as the battlefield, and we must pursue them wherever they are.

Who were these enemies? He did not mention Osama bin Laden or al-Qaeda. Instead, he declared, “A terrorist underworld, including groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad and Jaish-e-Muhammad, operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centers of large cities.” To counter such a threat, he continued, American troops were being deployed in the Philippines, Somalia and Bosnia.

This reveals a very disparate collection of enemies—and an uncertain grasp of geography. First came three Palestinian and Lebanese militias fighting against Israel, not the US, and not involved in Afghanistan—plus a Kashmiri militia fighting against India, not the US. None of these fight in “deserts or jungles.” The US troops he mentioned were dispatched to quite different destinations, in Europe, Africa and South-East Asia. These terrorists were globally distributed, but their connection to the US remained utterly unclear.

As if one global struggle were not enough, Bush the Younger added another. “Our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction.” National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice explained that this meant “rogue states . . . seeking chemical and biological weapons, improving long-range missiles and pursuing nuclear weapons capability.” Bush mentioned by name North Korea, Iran and Iraq,

## 6 INCOHERENT EMPIRE

adding, “States like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.” He was declaring two new world wars at once, while still embroiled in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> Such is the ambition of the new imperialism in action, mobilizing Americans under the claim that imminent danger threatens the homeland.

The Quadrennial Defense Review, issued two weeks after 9-11, made no mention of US peacekeeping, humanitarian or sanctions-enforcing missions. Bush said the military budget must grow 15 percent between 2002 and 2003, with a further 8 percent increase projected by 2007. Spending would be increased on almost all programs, from Star Wars to counter-terrorism through a raft of traditional big-muscle programs. The Review declared that all wars would be prosecuted by “decisive defeat of adversaries,” “regime change” and “occupying foreign territory until US strategic objectives are met.” There was no ambition for permanent rule abroad. But it seemed that a “temporary territorial Empire” was being contemplated, a radical departure from the “informal Empire” which the US had run since 1945. The ambition of the new imperialists was astonishing in a country and a world which had seemed to reject territorial imperialism some while back.

The Nuclear Posture Review leaked in March 2002 escalated even further. It targeted Russia for first-strike (i.e. preemptive) rather than second-strike nuclear weapons, despite the fact that the US was now much stronger than Russia in conventional weapons. It increased to five the number of “rogue states,” Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Libya and Syria, and said for the first time that they were potential targets for a nuclear strike. It called for the development of new low-yield and variable-yield theater nuclear warheads. Since these would require testing, more international treaties would have to be abandoned. In 2002 Bush the Younger repeatedly endorsed “preemptive strikes” and “regime change” even if the US “might have to do it alone.” This was serious gearing-up for wars and occupations of territory around the world, to be fought by the US alone if necessary.

We cannot attribute all this escalation only to Bush the Younger and his chicken-hawks. For decades the US had used its enormous military machine quite freely across the world. Then, as the USSR collapsed, its newfound military preponderance led to interventions in Panama, the Gulf War, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo. In contrast Europe turned inward to its own unification, reducing its defense budgets. UN interventions also declined. By 2002 only 24,000 UN troops were deployed around the world, far less than NATO forces in Yugoslavia

alone. UN peacekeeping forces now came from the armies of developing countries, while NATO peacekeeping detachments were dominated by the US.<sup>5</sup>

The year 1993 had been a watershed. It was a Democratic administration that was then edging forward. President Clinton, in a speech at the Citadel military academy, avoided the customary “last resort” reference to the use of force, saying instead that force might be preferred if other options seemed “less practicable.” His Defense Secretary Les Aspin talked of possible preemptive military action. The Pentagon’s “revolution in military affairs,” leading into the development of “smart” weapons, began with a famous memo to William Perry, Aspin’s successor, that year. Samuel Huntington wrote at the time that “a world without US primacy will be a world with more violence and disorder and less democracy and economic growth.”<sup>6</sup> Near the end of his administration, Clinton signaled unhappiness over Kyoto and the International Criminal Court, did not sign the Land-Mines Treaty, and bombed Iraq, Afghanistan and the Sudan. It was in 1998, under Clinton, that French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine coined the term *hyper-puissance*, “hyper-power,” to vividly capture the sense of a hyperactive and anti-social superpower. The drift which culminated in the new imperialism was underway. It might be seen as the logical consequence of the untrammelled power which the American foreign policy establishment felt it enjoyed after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

But the Democrats would not have reached it unaided, and nor would Republican Party elders brought up on more pragmatic policies. Neither envisaged unilateral, uninvited and essentially unprovoked invasions of foreign countries—except of tiny countries viewed as being in the American “backyard,” like Grenada and Panama. Major interventions during the 1990s had differed. In the 1991 Gulf War Saddam had violated international law by invading Kuwait and the US had assembled a UN-backed coalition which included his Arab neighbors. In Bosnia and Kosovo ethnic civil wars were raging and intervention was begged for by the groups suffering most and aided by the UN and NATO. True, the interventions were not even-handed, and bombing unaccompanied by troops who could control events on the ground worsened this (that was my view at the time). But in these cases American militarism was more or less normal for the post-1945 period. Behind them lay a mainly pragmatic and defensive notion of military power. If we were threatened, we could respond, with overwhelming force if necessary. But there was no sense of using militarism offensively

## 8 INCOHERENT EMPIRE

to remake the world into a better place. An embryo version of this did emerge under Clinton—the notion of using US military power for “purely humanitarian reasons,” to save the people of backward countries from their own rulers or each other. These might be seen as “civilizing missions,” characteristic of the mindset of some past imperial powers.

But to get to the new imperialism, three further triggers were required. The first was pure accident. Thanks to the “hanging chads” of Florida and the bias of the American electoral system toward rural, smaller conservative states, Bush was elected despite winning slightly fewer votes than his Democratic opponent, Al Gore. Such was the low turnout, Bush the Younger received support from under a quarter of those Americans eligible to vote. Since very few Americans decide how to vote on foreign policy issues, the advent of the new imperialism was not due to any upsurge in aggression among the American people. Instead, it was due to world-historical bad luck.

The second trigger was the staffing of a US administration by neo-conservative Christian chicken-hawks with a mysterious affinity to the Israeli political right. They were raring for military action in support of “good” against “evil,” not just in the name of humanitarianism but influenced by a Judeo-Christian fundamentalism and by visceral hatred of Clinton, whom they accused of cowardice in the face of the enemy. I do not pretend to fully fathom this coup within the Republican Party, and over their presidential candidate who had shown little knowledge or interest in foreign policy. It had complex domestic as well as foreign-policy origins. Domestic as well as foreign issues became more orientated to moral goals, and so less amenable to pragmatic compromise. The problem in foreign policy was compounded by the formidable power of the American military. Here, unlike domestic policy, the neo-conservatives sensed that they did not *need* to compromise. They could ignore the views of the rest of the world and achieve good through conquest. When I began to read their writings and speeches I recognized immediately the mindset, for the notion of achieving morally desirable goals through violence—if necessary, over piles of dead bodies—was familiar to me from all the imperialists, fascists and ethnic cleansers it has been my misfortune to study in recent years. I fear politicians when they come bearing morality!

Their dominance inside the new administration may also have had a near-accidental trigger. The inexperienced Bush invited Dick Cheney, the highly experienced but neo-conservative hawk, to supervise the

“transition team” which initially staffed his administration. Cheney put his chicken-hawk cronies into most of the key positions in Defense, and a few in State. But their project remained incomplete, since neither the armed forces nor most of the top men in the State Department shared their ethos.

The third trigger changed that. It came suddenly, on 9-11-2001. Osama bin Laden gave them that day the popular mobilizing power and the targets. “Terrorists” everywhere were suddenly the main enemy, and poor countries (and rich Israel) had to be saved from the menace of “fundamentalist” Muslims and “rogue” states. The extension of these two adjectives, “fundamentalist” and “rogue,” brought strange bedfellows into their line of fire. Bin Laden, Saddam and Kim Jong Il really had almost nothing in common. For the next two years bin Laden and Bush were to dance their provocative *pas de deux* together, each radicalizing and mobilizing the forces of the other.

Inside the American military/strategic community—though not yet in the High Command—it also seemed that the US now had the military wizardry to achieve victory followed by moral good without risking the lives of American soldiers or civilians. Since we now could do these things, they reasoned, why not give it a try? That was the military temptation underlying the shift toward the new imperialism. The new imperialists in charge of the Department of Defense now had the mobilizing power and the budgetary resources to lure the more cautious armed forces into their plans. The notion of civilian control of the military became meaningless, since civilians were the leading militarists. We will see that the so-called new imperialism actually became something much simpler and much nastier—the new militarism.

But the new imperialists see their goals as entirely benign. These have been spelled out most fully by neo-conservative journalists and scholars close to the White House. They tend to avoid terms like “militarism” and “imperialism,” but they do like the resonance of the noun “Empire” and its adjective “imperial.” These terms suddenly seem full of noble, civilizing, even humanitarian sentiments. The Empire will bring peace, freedom and democracy to the world! They will save oppressed peoples from their own “rogue” leaders! Some hark back to the days of the British Empire. This is why I have styled the two Presidents Bush the Elder and Bush the Younger, recalling the titles of the two Pitts, father and son, the British Prime Ministers who led their country at the height of its imperial greatness. But for most Americans the British analogy raises uncomfortable images of redcoats and taxes.

Anyway, they say, the US today has a lot more power than the Brits ever did, and their power didn't last long (a potentially disquieting thought). Better skip the centuries to the noblest imperialists of them all, and to the couplet

*pax romana,*  
*pax americana.*

"The fact is," said Charles Krauthammer, "no country has been as dominant culturally, economically, technologically and militarily in the history of the world since the late Roman Empire." The collapse of the Soviet Union, he said, left a "unipolar moment," an unchallengeable America ruling the world. Robert Kaplan wrote "Rome's victory in the Second Punic War, like America's in World War II, made it a universal power." He suggested America follow the Roman example, and develop "warrior politics," with eyes wide open.<sup>7</sup>

For Robert Kagan the new imperialism was realism.<sup>8</sup> Since the US actually *has* imperial powers, we might as well use them for good. He contrasted the recent American experience of reality with that of the Europeans. They had recently achieved European integration peacefully and multilaterally, by negotiations and without militarism. Europe "is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation . . . the realization of Kant's 'Perpetual Peace.'" The United States, meanwhile, "remains mired in history, exercising power in the anarchic Hobbesian world." Only martial virtues can deal with this. It is no surprise that Europe is averse to military power. "It is what weaker powers have wanted from time immemorial." Since European military budgets are small and declining, Iraq, Iran and North Korea are simply not their problem. They *cannot* respond with vigor. Piety is their specialism. Actually, it is hypocrisy, since peace in Europe depends ultimately on US military might.

Krauthammer revealed even more resentment of Europeans:

Our sophisticated European cousins are aghast. The French led the way. . . . They deem it a breach of good manners to call evil by its name. They prefer accommodating to it. They have lots of practice, famously accommodating Nazi Germany in 1940. We are in a war for self-defense. It is also a war for Western civilization. If the Europeans refuse to see themselves as part of this struggle, fine. . . . We will let them hold our coats, but not tie our hands.<sup>9</sup>

All these authors stressed that the US could bring peace to a world which remained obdurately Hobbesian. Kagan said that the "benevolent

hegemony exercised by the US is good for a vast portion of the world's population." It is humanitarian.

The historian Paul Kennedy went way beyond Rome, as revealed by his title, "The Greatest Superpower Ever."<sup>10</sup> Dinesh D'Souza concurred: "Since the end of the cold war, the US has exercised an unparalleled and largely unrivaled influence throughout the world—economically, politically, culturally, and militarily." He agreed that the US was more benevolent than all previous Empires. Observing that his own homeland of India used to be held down with 100,000 British troops, he made the enormous claim "the US empire [is] the most magnanimous imperial power ever. . . . If this be the workings of empire, let us have more of it."

Philip Bobbit is the author of a massive book on the modern history of states. He emphasizes both their militarist origins and their recent drive toward peace and legitimacy. This is a grand teleological tome, history as destiny, culminating in a global benevolent American Empire—a terrible "Long War" between sovereign states culminated in an American-guaranteed peace. His "constitutional theory" rates democracy and human rights above state sovereignty (which, he says, was responsible for the Long War). If a state is not democratic and does not protect human rights, then its "cloak of sovereignty" should no longer protect it from military intervention. He instances Iraq as just such a case. The United States, being immensely powerful, democratic *and* committed to human rights, is the only power which combines the might and the right to attack Iraq and others. For the same reason, he says the US has the right to take preemptive action against weapons of mass destruction, and to have immunity from international law for its own military forces.<sup>11</sup> Since over half the states in the world are neither genuinely democratic nor respectful of human rights, Bobbitt's so-called constitutional theory would seemingly place much of the world at risk of American invasion. This is a theory doing imperial service.

Even most liberals and leftists agree that American power is enormous, though they often disapprove. Joseph Nye, Assistant Secretary of State under Clinton, says, "not since Rome has one nation loomed so large above the others." But he adds that since others consent to American domination *because* it embodies benign values (which are also their own), the US must not abandon these values. He concludes that the US must resist the growing imperial temptations.<sup>12</sup>

A broader point lies behind such arguments. An Empire of pure benevolence might seem impossible. But an Empire to which the ruled

## 12 INCOHERENT EMPIRE

routinely consent is not unusual. This is what we call “hegemony,” a word which indicates that the imperial power establishes “the rules of the game” by which others routinely play. Others may come to approve of the rules as well, so that hegemony is also partly legitimate. But the basis of hegemony is more of a matter-of-fact acceptance of things “as the way they are.” Then people’s own everyday actions help reproduce the dominance without much thought. For example, the US dollar is the world’s reserve currency, stable, secure, so foreigners routinely invest in the US economy, subsidizing American consumers and indirectly paying for the US military, without their even being much aware of this. Foreigners see this mainly as the way the global economy works, and so it is also the way they can make profits. In practical terms they consent, though they may occasionally grumble. Of course, the catch is that to be hegemonic, the US has to play by the rules it has established. If unilateral militarism abandons the rules, it risks losing hegemony. That is the worry of the liberals.

Leftists have long denounced American imperialism—the word itself is theirs. By fusing two giants together—the United States and capitalism—they have often blamed most of the world’s ills on a single Leviathan, the capitalist-imperialist US. Leftists often credit the United States with simply enormous powers, and the conspiracy theorists among them see it as extraordinarily well organized. They agree with the hawks that this is imperialism, they just see it as a bad thing. Even much more sophisticated post-Marxists, like Perry Anderson, partake of this view. He sees no significant challenge to US power and hegemony anywhere. Other powers grumble, but they acquiesce. Even the consent of victims can be bought out by American capitalist development, he says.<sup>13</sup> Left, liberals and conservatives all agree: this is the Age of American Empire.

I disagree. But I do not argue here on high moral grounds, full of rhetorical denunciations of US policy. Nor do I claim that all we have to do is abandon imperial tendencies, embrace peace, and turn to nice caring multilateralists and peaceniks, embodied by the UN. Leaving everything to the UN might be a recipe for the deployment of high moral sentiments, endless political squabbles, and little action. Even so, this would be better than endless war. But better still would be more realism about the limitations of *both* sets of options—multilateral and unilateral, negotiations and force, carrots and sticks. Then perhaps we can work our way toward some more productive blending of their better qualities.

This book attacks the supposedly “realist” heart of the new imperialism. I draw up a comprehensive inventory of the more limited powers that are actually available to the US. As in my previous work, I distinguish four main types of power: military, political, economic and ideological.<sup>14</sup> Chapters 1–4 will detail these four types of power resource possessed by the US. I am not alone in arguing that the new imperialists exaggerate American powers. Like “world-systems theorists,” the French demographer and essayist Emmanuel Todd suggests American decline has already set in and will not be reversed by the new imperialists. He says all its powers are weakening. Its military has a soft underbelly—reluctance to take casualties; its economic “tribute-taking” is increasingly fragile; its own democracy is weakening while global democracy is strengthening global resistance against the US; and the US is recoiling from American values which have had a universal appeal. While the US is weakening in all four ways, its potential rivals Europe and Russia—and later China—are beginning a resurgence.<sup>15</sup> I agree with some but not all of Todd’s arguments. I do not see the demise of the new imperialists as coming from the rise of another power or from general imperial over-stretch, but from extremely uneven power resources. These lead not to general collapse but to imperial incoherence and foreign policy failure. Hopefully, this will be followed by voluntary abandonment of the imperial project by Americans, and this would preserve most of the US hegemony.

My argument can be illustrated with a rather ghastly metaphor. The American Empire will turn out to be a military giant, a backseat economic driver, a political schizophrenic and an ideological phantom. The result is a disturbed, misshapen monster stumbling clumsily across the world. It means well. It intends to spread order and benevolence, but instead it creates more disorder and violence. I further argue that the US has more uneven imperial powers than any of its historic predecessors, and I make comparisons with the Roman and with recent European Empires, from the massive British to the tiny Belgian Empire. Within their conquered terrains they were all far more powerful than the United States can be.

But the new imperialists do not want to rule permanently over foreign lands. They want only an indirect and informal Empire, though one that threatens, coerces and even sometimes invades foreign states, improves them and then leaves. Nor do they threaten the whole world. The prosperous North of the world contains neither disorder, nor military rivals, nor collective resistance. All that the US requires is that

#### 14 INCOHERENT EMPIRE

the Northern states stick to their own affairs and not interfere in American imperial projects elsewhere. It expects they will be too divided to do this anyway, and believes it can divide and rule among them. This was the purpose of Donald Rumsfeld's division between the "old" and the "new" Europe when European opposition did surface in late 2002.

Much of the South of the world remains off limits for different reasons. Some regions are racked by poverty, disease, oppressive but failing states, ethnic and religious conflicts and civil and neighborhood wars. The US does hope that its informal economic imperialism can contribute to "draining the swamp" of poverty amidst which many of these problems fester. I discuss this in Chapter 2. But rarely does the US sally forth with guns blazing across these difficult zones of the South. It almost totally ignores sub-Saharan Africa. In Latin America it presently confines itself to screwing down Cuba and projecting limited force into Colombia, though a sally into Venezuela has been recently contemplated. South Asia is left largely alone for a different reason, since India and Indonesia are too big and independent for the US to mess with them. Most of the world is left largely alone.

That leaves two main areas of serious concern for the US. The first involves the communist and post-communist countries of the world. But Russia and China are much too big and powerful to be messed with. The US surrounds them warily with bases, but does not intervene in them. It has been burned once in Vietnam, and Cuba is trivial. North Korea remains the only "serious" communist enemy ripe for action, and so North-East Asia gets close attention from the new imperialists. But the second "problem area" is the really big one. This is the Middle East, a region which is potentially expandable into the entire Muslim world stretching in a great belt from Nigeria in West Africa to Indonesia in South-East Asia. This is thought to require considerable American attention because it contains oil, Israel (America's closest but most unruly ally) and major internal instabilities. Islam is the most powerfully mobilizing of the world's religions, and its pan-Islamic reach tends to undercut the legitimacy of oppressive states (though it is also capable of oppression itself). As a long opponent of Western imperialism, it also resists American intrusions quite strongly. Israel also destabilizes its Arab neighbors. By exploiting all these issues, the cold-war superpowers added much more instability. Thus most states in the region maintain unusually large military forces and several of them actively seek nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. This is a conflicted, highly armed region.

So the two main thrusts of the new imperialism are into the Muslim Middle East and North-East Asia. My Chapters 5–8 examine the Empire in action in these regions, focusing on the ongoing wars against Afghanistan, terrorism and “rogue states” wielding “weapons of mass destruction”—which for the moment means mainly Iraq, but also North Korea. But the new imperialists have only just begun. Their ambition will not rest content with conquering Iraq and refusing to talk to North Korea. There is more to come, especially in the Middle East.

It might seem a little bizarre that new imperialists test their mettle not on major powers, but on an international terrorist movement consisting of less than a thousand people, and on small, poor, unpopular states of the South with few economic resources and armed forces which could not stand up in open terrain for a week against American military might. Emmanuel Todd pokes French fun at the prospect of the mighty Empire puffing up its chest with victories over such puny enemies. But this misses the point. The new imperialists say that the end only justifies the means where wars will be short and relatively easy, with few casualties. They do not advocate the much greater devastation that would follow from taking on China, even though China may be as “rogue-like” as Iraq. The problem is rather that the ends cannot be achieved even through short, easy wars, and while the wars are being waged, the really serious problems of the world drift by.

I here assess progress so far, and the prospects for opposition against the imperial project. We shall see that the new imperialists overestimate American power by focusing only on military power. They forget that US economic power is somewhat fragile, they neglect political power altogether (especially in their incompetent planning of the Iraq attack), and their actions completely contradict the sources of American ideological power.

Thus they consistently generate what Chalmers Johnson calls “blowback,” resistance coming as the unintended consequence of their own actions.<sup>16</sup> Blowback may be from the victims and their sympathizers. That is why I devote much attention to detailing the experiences and opinions of Arabs, who are at present at the receiving end of the Empire. But blowback may also come from America’s discontented allies. We shall see that the new imperialism creates more, not fewer, terrorists, that it creates more determined “rogue states,” and that it weakens American leadership in the world. But the enemies of the United States are wrong to see it as the Great Satan or the Evil Empire. It is not that well organized. This is an incoherent Empire whose

overconfident, hyperactive militarism will soon destroy it. In response to their limitations, the new imperialists are grasping ever more firmly on to the one power they do possess in abundance—offensive military devastation. My conclusion will be that in reality the new American imperialism is becoming the new American militarism. But that is not sufficient for Empire. Those who live by the sword . . .

#### NOTES

1. Raghda Dirgham, "Iraq Is a Tryout for the Doctrine of Anything Goes," *Al-Hayat*, available in Arabic at [www.alhayet.com](http://www.alhayet.com).
2. All these reports are available on the world-wide web through their titles. See also "Pentagon White Paper," *New York Times*, March 8, 1992; Frances Fitzgerald, "George Bush and the World," *New York Review of Books*, September 26, 2002; Jay Bookman, "Real Goal in Iraq," *Atlantic-Journal Constitution*, October 1, 2002; and [www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org](http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org). The quotes from Powell and Bush are from Bob Woodward *Bush at War*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, pp. 281–2, 333, 341.
3. Though one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter, terrorists do what the name suggests: they seek to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies by killings that blur distinctions between soldiers and civilians. Terrorists are conventionally defined as non-state actors, but they are matched by "state terrorists"—states doing the same thing.
4. For the full speech, see *New York Times*, January 30, 2002.
5. Former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, writing in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, January 2–8, 2003, issue no. 619.
6. "Why International Primacy Matters," *International Security*, vol. 17, p. 83.
7. Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*, 1990–91; Kaplan, *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos*, New York: Random House, 2001.
8. In his essays "The Benevolent Empire," *Foreign Policy*, summer 1998, and "Power and Weakness. Why Europe and the US See the World Differently," *Policy Review*, June–July 2002.
9. "The Axis of Petulance," *Washington Post*, March 1, 2002. Note that the US also accommodated to Nazism until Hitler actually declared war on it. And to those who say that but for the Americans

the French would be speaking German, I reply that but for the French the Americans would still be speaking English with a British accent. In 1763 the British defeated the French and Indian enemies of the American colonists. Their gratitude lasted less than two decades. Then they revolted. Gratitude does not extend through the generations.

10. In *New Perspectives Quarterly*, winter 2002.
11. *The Shield of Achilles*, New York: Knopf, 2001, pp. 678ff.
12. *The Paradox of American Power*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
13. "Force and Consent," *New Left Review*, New Series, no. 17, September–October 2002.
14. I have previously deployed this fourfold model in my history of the development of human societies, of which two volumes have appeared so far: *The Sources of Social Power, vol. I: A History of Power From the Beginning to 1760 AD*, and *vol. II: The Rise of Classes and Nation States, 1760–1914*. Both Cambridge University Press, 1986 and 1993. Volume III, *Globalizations*, is now underway.
15. Emmanuel Todd, *Après L'Empire*, Paris: Gallimard, 2002. For a world-systems theorist, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World System*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, and Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly Silver, *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
16. *Blowback: the Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, New York: Henry Holt, 2000. Johnson initially restricts his term to the intended consequences of secret, CIA-style US policies, but later uses it in the broader sense used here.