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American Empire

Past, Present, and Future

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Abstract

This essay examines the past, present, and future of the American Empire. America is an empire, and its actions during the last half century have been indicative of such. Like all great empires, America seems set to decline due to a multitude of factors. I will find the reasons for this decline by examining the course of events from the end of World War II up until the present day. By taking these factors into account, I will make predictions as to what the possible future of the American Empire might be. The thesis is divided up into three separate but interconnected sections that focus on American foreign policy. The first part focuses on the past of the American empire, and takes a critical stance toward American expansionism during the Cold War period until the arrival of the Bush administration. The second section examines the present of the American Empire, and explains such phenomenon as the Bush doctrine, the Iraq War, and the War on Terror. The last section of the thesis makes predictions as to what the future of the American empire might be, building its diagnosis upon the foundations set by the previous two sections.

Keywords: America, Empire, Imperialism, Bush, Iraq

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1 Introduction

It seems as if the current Bush administration has managed to stir up the ire and resentment of the international community in ways that few of its predecessors have. Whether it be the ongoing, bogged-down mess otherwise known as the Iraq War, or that other seemingly neverending and opaque war known as the “War on Terror”, the current situation the present administration finds itself in and the policies it has used to get itself there have given rise to criticism from all ends of the spectrum. Indeed, it seems as if American imperial ambitions are more transparent now than they have ever been. Subsequently, many are led to believe that the once seemingly noble American vanguard of freedom around the world has now been hijacked by the Bush administration and replaced by a bunch of power-hungry imperialists. Although there is some validity to this claim, the roots of the current American foreign policy in fact run much deeper than the five years the Bush administration has been in office. In actuality, the American imperial juggernaut that we are witness to today has been an evolving beast with an initial gestation in the years following World War II followed by a continued growth over the last half century. Depending on how far one wishes to take it, the birth of the American Empire can even be traced all the way back to the aftermath of the American-Spanish war, when the United States began to establish colonies outside of its borders. Fundamentally, there is a “red thread” that one can follow throughout the last half century which can lead to an understanding of how America has reached the point that it finds itself in today. By taking into account what *has happened* and what *is happening*, I hope to come to be able to make some predictions as to what *will happen*. Hence the concept of the past, present and future of the American Empire.

1.1 Problem

The United States perceives itself as the master of the universe. And who is to argue? It’s military eclipses all others in the world by a long mile. The American economy is massive and dynamic, and the dollar is still the standard by which world trade is conducted. American culture (or lack thereof) has permeated all corners of the globe. Indeed, in these strange times it seems as if only the gorillas in the Congo would be startled by the sight of an Coca-Cola drinking African youth clothed in nike sneakers and a Britney Spears t-shirt. Taking into account these military, economic and cultural factors, America is now an empire in all but name. Some have even been inclined to dub The United States of America “The New Rome”.

But is this American Empire standing on solid ground? In the opinions of numerous scholars, the answer is no. Yes, it is true that the United States is currently the only global superpower. America achieved this position of preeminence following the collapse of Communism in the early 1990s. Throughout this decade, it seemed as if America was stronger than ever. With Communism no longer inhibiting it, the United States was free to set the tone for the rest of the world. It's military and economic strength, along with the support of the global community, enabled it to effectively squash "rogue states" in hotspots such as Kosovo and Iraq . But the events of September 11th along with the "War on Terror" and the subsequent invasion and continuing quagmire in Iraq, have left the vulnerabilities of the American Empire out in the open for all the world to see.

According to a long list of scholars on the subject, the American Empire reached its pinnacle in the 1970s and has been on a steady decline ever since. Recent events such as September 11th, the War on Terror, and the Iraq War have only served to speed up this downward spiral. The United States is still full of imperial ambitions and wrapped up in the delusion that it can do what it wants when it wants, with little regard for the rest of the international community. But if one researches the subject and digs beneath the surface, certain fundamental truths arise. Perhaps most riveting is the realization that America no longer is capable of "going it alone" due to military, economic and political weaknesses. Nor do these deficiencies seem as if they will be able to be recouped. In reality, the American Empire no longer has the means to attain the ends that it so desires. There is also a host of other factors such as the rapid economic rises of Asia and the European Union that must be taken into account.

What my thesis fundamentally centers around is the past, present and future of the American Empire. By taking this concept one step further and breaking it down into problems, I shall seek to answer (among other things): Is the American Empire on the decline? If this is the case, why? What signs and shockwaves of this decline are already apparent? Furthermore, was this decline inevitable or was it a direct result of the policies of the Bush administration? How do such phenomenon as the War on Terror and the Iraq War fit into the puzzle? Even though this is an America-centric essay, I also strive to touch upon what this possible decline means to the rest of the world.

1.2 Theory

This essay revolves around the theory that America is an empire. Given this understanding, I am able to place the course of American foreign policy during the last half century into context. An imperial context. In doing so, concepts and theories of empires past can be applied to the American model. Fundamental ideas such as imperialism and imperial overstretch can be directly applied. Something else to take into consideration is the fact that throughout the course of history many empires have risen and fallen, so why should America be any different?

Perhaps the greatest difference between America and empires of days gone by is that we can actually see this empirical fall coming, and diagnose its symptoms and causes. My thesis is not heavily reliant on political science theories and is grounded in more concrete, less abstract concepts. My essay seeks to tell the ongoing story of the American empire through historical tendencies and modern-day occurrences, hopefully bringing about a “red thread” for the reader.

1.3 Method

The body of this essay will consist of three parts. By breaking down the core of the thesis into three distinct but nevertheless inter-connected sections dealing with the past, present, and future of the American Empire, I hope that an overarching theme becomes apparent to the reader. The theme being that the United States of the last half century has always been an empire, and that its actions have been reflective of this truth. A well-known phrase is that “you don’t know where you are going if you don’t know where you’ve come from” and in the context of this essay I believe that holds true.

The first section shall examine American foreign policy in an imperial context from the end of World War II until the end of the Clinton administration. This span of time will be divided up into two periods, with the first covering America’s assertions of power during the Cold War era. The second period will cover, albeit in a brisk sense, the continued expansion of the American Empire after the fall of Communism and throughout the 1990’s.

The second section of the essay will look at the present of the American Empire with a critical eye. This part will be divided into four subsections that cover different aspects of modern-day American foreign policy. The first details the political doctrine of the man of the moment, George W. Bush, and how it fits into the wider context of empire. Next, the ideology of a little-known but *extremely* influential and powerful entity known as The Project for the New American Century (PNAC) is examined. I then go on to examine why the United States *really* decided to go to war with Iraq, and the military and economic motivations for doing so. Lastly, the true nature of the “The War on Terror” is revealed.

The third, and perhaps most speculative, part of the essay deals with the future of the American Empire. Even though it is difficult to make predictions in regards to what that future might be, one can draw upon the fates of past empires in order to make some valid assumptions. This section will ponder the future of the United States based upon current circumstances. Powerful as it is, the American Empire is not immune to the symptoms of decline such as imperial overstretch. This (imperial overstretch) will be examined along with its direct correlation to the situation the United States currently finds itself in. Based on my research, the outlook for the future of the American Empire is not an uplifting one.

Finally, I will offer my conclusions and discuss them. I hope that the “red thread” that I have attempted to maintain throughout the paper will lead the reader

to this point and that we are “on the same page” in more ways than one when I present my final comments.

1.4 Material

One advantage of writing about a topic such as this is that there is certainly no shortage of source material. The critics of American foreign policy are seemingly everywhere nowadays. Among the literary sources that I will be incorporating into my essay are such well-known figures as Chalmers Johnson and Emmanuel Todd, as well as lesser-known but highly credible writers like Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed and John Pilger (just to name a few). There is also a wealth of journals and other works critical of the United States on the internet, and I have documented and woven these into the essay to great effect.

Some of these authors figure more prominently in certain sections than others. For example, “The Bush Doctrine” section gains much of its source material from the book *America Unbound* which is co-authored by Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay. The “PNAC” part is based upon criticisms of a document that can be viewed on the internet. “The War on Terror” segment builds much of its foundation on Ahmed’s investigations of the war that goes by the same name.

The third section of the thesis, which ponders the future of the American Empire, draws primarily on the ideas of Todd. But for the most part, the essay is a conglomeration of numerous and varied sources rather than one that is heavily dependent on two or three books.

Basically, given the enormous depth and complexity of the sources used, I have attempted to draw from the strengths of each. In doing so, I have strived to bring about an end result where they seem to complement each other as well as move the essay along the common theme of where the American Empire has been, where it is, and where it is going. In theory, this essay is an attempt at condensing themes discussed in books several hundred pages long into an essay format.

2 The Past of The American Empire

Just to give the reader an idea exactly what we are dealing with here: between 1945 and 1999 the United States had conducted extremely serious military interventions against over *seventy* nations to secure the following basic imperatives:¹

- making the world safe for American corporations;
- enhancing the financial statements of defence contractors at home that have contributed generously to members of Congress;
- preventing the rise of any society that might serve as a successful example of an alternative to the capitalist model;
- extending political and economic hegemony over as wide an area as possible, as befits a 'great power'²

The true nature underlying the American foreign policy of the last half century and up to the present day lies within these four simple statements.

2.1 Post WW II to the fall of the Berlin Wall

The American age of empire was in its infancy following the end of the Spanish-American war. At that point the United States began colonizing outside of its borders for the first time. But it was not until half a century later that the American imperial project *really* got underway. At this point the United States emerged victorious from the ashes of World War II, a newly-minted superpower and self-appointed "leader of the free world". Some of its earliest actions at this time were already indicative of things to come, albeit under the guise of stemming the tide of communism.

After helping defeat Nazi Germany, the United States occupied the Western sector of Germany for ten years (1945 to 1955).³ America also occupied Japan (1945 to 1951) and put into effect a dramatic restructuring of Japanese society in order to prevent it from becoming a military threat.⁴ These were two of the most dramatic examples of American foreign intervention at this time, and along with occupation inevitably comes criticism. However, as the source used above goes on to point out, how the United States dealt with these two nations was not

¹ Ahmed 2003 p. 10

² Ibid 10, 11

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_United_States_Imperialism#After_World_War_II

⁴ Ibid

perceived as imperialistic by most people at the time. Many of the post war actions were implemented as a result of Cold War policy and anti-communist feelings, which were the basis of much of the United States foreign policy.⁵

Fundamentally, instead of a struggle between key imperialist powers (notably the conflict between the European powers and the rising Japanese and American superpowers) there was the system of imperialism characterized between the USSR and the West, in particular the United States.⁶ Taking into account factors mentioned above (such as the division of Germany and the occupation of Japan) as well as the relative decline of British imperialism, the old multipolar competition was subsumed in the competition between the US and the USSR.⁷

The thing is, by intervening in the affairs of these two nations as well as others during the Cold War period under the guise of fighting communism, the United States was given a free hand and convenient cover to the world which allowed it to go after what was the real motivation, namely gaining control of land and resources, and the establishment of more military bases. No doubt that the rest of the world would have a harder time accepting these “more openly imperialistic purposes”.⁸

As Ahmed makes clear in *Behind the War on Terror*, in order to establish ideological legitimacy for Anglo-American imperialism, it was essential to manufacture a global threat that would provide justification for military interventions designed to expand the US empire.⁹ Propaganda, in other words. By fabricating a malignant global threat to the very existence of Western civilization, the great powers could legitimize the illegitimate use of force.¹⁰ According to Ahmed, this is how the Cold War escalated, an “apparently noble defense against global communist aggression”.¹¹ This would have dire consequences for the rest of the world, as this need for containment would turn an informal empire that began in World War II into hundreds of installations around the world for the largest military ever maintained in peacetime.¹² Furthermore, the creation of new bases requires more new bases to protect the ones already established, producing ever-tighter cycles of militarism, wars, arms sales, and base expansions.¹³

When considering the Cold War from an imperial perspective, the focus tends to lean toward those situations that involved forms of military conflict and expansionism between the two superpowers. But the displays of power by the American military, characterized by conflicts such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the nuclear arms buildup race, and military interventions in places such as Korea and Vietnam are just one component of a larger picture. What many people tend

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Shakwi 2002

http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Imperialism_Neocolonialism/TurningPoint_US_Imperial.html

⁷ Ibid

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_United_States_Imperialism#After_World_War_II

⁹ Ahmed 2003 p. 7

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Johnson 2004 p. 2

¹³ Ibid p. 214

to overlook are the effects of cultural and economic expansionism/imperialism by the United States. The main aspects of Cold War policy were the defense of the West and the spread of the market system into areas where it hadn't previously been.¹⁴ The United States championed the cause of decolonization, although with a catch: it supported the dissolution of formal structures of colonial rule, but on the condition of economic penetration and informal empire.¹⁵

Another name for this form of expansionism is "neo-imperialism". Michael Parenti, author of the book *Against Empire*, has described the situation these weaker countries find themselves in. Rather than being directly colonized by the United States, the weaker countries have been granted the trappings of sovereignty--while Western finance capital retains control of the lion's share of their profitable resources.¹⁶ After years of colonialism, the country finds it extremely difficult to extricate itself from the unequal relationship with its former colonizer and impossible to depart from the global capitalist sphere.¹⁷

This phenomenon has been most apparent in the third world. The weak economies and corrupt governments that often seem to characterize these countries make them prime candidates for exploitation. As Parenti describes it, those countries that try to make a break are subjected to punishing economic and military treatment by one or another major power, which in this case is the United States.¹⁸ The adds further to the argument that the real motivation behind US military interventions during the Cold War was not was not Soviet deterrence but the crushing of popular, indigenous nationalist movements for independence, and the establishment of US control over strategic regions.¹⁹

As a direct result of these neo-imperialist policies, that the United States began to experience its first problems with "blowback". This is the CIA's term for the unanticipated consequences of unacknowledged actions in other people's countries.²⁰ Or as Chalmers Johnson puts it, blowback is simply another way of saying that a nation reaps what it sows.²¹ More recently the current Western obsession with "failed states" reflects an imperialist attempt to absolve itself from creating such disasters.²² Nations such as Somalia and Afghanistan come to mind. It is hardly surprising that America's thinly-veiled imperialist policies during the Cold War period made more than a few nations resentful, especially the poorer ones that were mentioned earlier. Many of these countries went from being colonial possessions to nothing more than economic adjuncts to the United

¹⁴ Shakwi 2002

http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Imperialism_Neocolonialism/TurningPoint_US_Imperial.html

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Parenti 1995 <http://www.michaelparenti.org/Imperialism101.html>

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ahmed 2003 p. 8

²⁰ Johnson 2004 p. 8

²¹ Ibid p. 9

²² Selfa 2002 http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/American_Empire/New_Colonial_Age_Empire.html

States.²³ This enormous resentment gave rise to a large amount of anti-US nationalist movements that demanded more, often using violence to make their intentions clear. It is also the same phenomenon that we are now seeing in Iraq today, a backlash against “occupiers” rather than “liberators”.

Another problem that the United States was facing at this time (1970’s) was that it was an economic power in relative decline to the rise of Germany and Japan.²⁴ So whereas America succeeded in preventing these nations from becoming a military threat, it failed to foresee the consequences their economic reemergence would have for future US foreign policy. As Emmanuel Todd points out, during the early 1970’s a deficit in the balance of trade began to open.²⁵ The US assumed the role of consumer and the rest of the world took on the role of producer, in an increasingly unbalanced global process.²⁶ Due to this as well as a host of other factors, it became increasingly difficult for the United States to maintain its commitments to the defense of the West and the world, with the most obvious example being the economic and military difficulties it had with its commitments in Vietnam.²⁷

2.2 Post-Communism through the 1990’s

“The real historical turning point – the moment when the twenty-first century may be said to have begun – was not 9/11 but 11/9. The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, changed the context of American power far more profoundly than the fall of the World Trade Center”.²⁸

The fall of the Berlin Wall was symbolic of many things. The “Evil Empire” had imploded, communism was all but dead, the competition between East and West was seemingly no more, and the United States had emerged victorious from the Cold War as the world’s sole superpower. Consequently, America was now emboldened to flex its imperial might unimpeded and in ways never seen before. Despite dire predictions that every military engagement would lead to a quagmire, America found that it could strike with virtual impunity almost anywhere on the globe, and military forays became more common.²⁹ Back when the superpower rivalry circumscribed America’s ability to use force directly, problems were more

²³ Shakwi 2002

http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Imperialism_Neocolonialism/TurningPoint_US_Imperial.html

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Senn, Lautenschlager 2003 http://dominionpaper.ca/features/2003/the_conceited_empire.html

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Shakwi 2002

http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Imperialism_Neocolonialism/TurningPoint_US_Imperial.html

²⁸ Ferguson 2004 p. 27

²⁹ Marshall 2004 http://www.newyorker.com/critics/atlarge?040202crat_atlarge

likely to be solved through high-stakes diplomacy or covert action.³⁰ Now America had been dealt a free hand to pursue its own interests, oftentimes through force. But how could America validate its oftentimes illegal use of force in the eyes of the world?

This answer to this question is critical to understanding American foreign policy during this time and up to the present day. Now that the “red menace” had been defeated, the United States no longer had a threat, real or imagined, to use as justification for furthering its imperialist ambitions. Subsequently, successive US administrations thus began working incessantly on new threats and pretexts with which to replace the dead threat of communism.³¹ Several spectres of doom came to the fore: rogue states, weapons of mass destruction and, most dangerous of all, Islamic terror.³² For example: during the Cold War, the traditional rationale of fighting "communism" in Nicaragua or Afghanistan justified U.S. intervention.³³ As the Cold War ended, another rationale emerged—policing the "New World Order" against so-called "rogue states."³⁴ In other words, states that don't accept the economic or political discipline of the US. The Gulf War against Iraq in 1991 provided the proving ground for this new imperialist ideology.³⁵

In addition to the need for new and ever-present threats, American imperial policy in the 1990's was underlined by two other crucial aspects. The first was that the United States felt the need to reestablish the right for the US military to intervene directly, not just through proxies (or substitutes).³⁶ So instead of training and supplying indigenous forces in order to do their dirty work in whatever country, the US was now inclined to skip the covert tactics and directly intervene with its own forces. Also, now that communism was by and large dead (China and Cuba notwithstanding), the United States needed to expand the other component of its imperial machine. In other words, economic imperialism had to be advanced.³⁷ It was now vital to bring in those areas of the world that had been previously dominated by the USSR and to penetrate other areas of the world more deeply—Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia.³⁸

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ahmed 2004 p. 11

³² Ibid p. 11

³³ Selfa 2002 http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/American_Empire/New_Colonial_Age_Empire.html

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Shakwi 2002

http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Imperialism_Neocolonialism/TurningPoint_US_Imperial.html

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

3 The Present of the American Empire

Many are led to believe that it has been George W. Bush and his administration that have been solely responsible for turning America into the bold-faced imperial juggernaut that it is today. Although it is undoubtable that Bush has left an indelible imprint on the the way the United States interacts with the world, I hope that by this point the reader will be able to look at the current state of affairs in a wider context, and regard the current Bush administration as part of a larger chain of events rather than an isolated anomaly. Nevertheless, George W. Bush has brought about dramatic changes in the ways America conducts its foreign policy.

3.1 The Bush Doctrine

The political doctrine of George W. Bush is reflective of the man himself. One characteristic of Bush is that he feels little need to explain his decisions to others. Indeed, in the words of Richard M. Ebeling, he seems to be engaging in a form of “presidential unilateralism”. Perhaps a quotation from the president can make this concept a little more clear. When Bush was asked if he had ever felt the need to explain anything as he planned a possible attack on Iraq, he replied, “Of course not...I’m the commander -- see, I don’t need to explain -- I don’t need to explain why I say things. That’s the interesting thing about being the president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, I don’t feel like I owe anybody an explanation.”³⁹

So basically Bush believes that he can do whatever he wants without being held accountable to anyone, because he is the President. Uh-huh. Ebeling characterizes the naturally bewildering reaction to this statement by Bush when he asks “what remains of the traditional conception of limited, constitutional government with separation of powers and Congressional responsibility for declarations of war when the president of the United States believes that he owes no one any explanation for what he says or does when it comes to military conflict?”⁴⁰ It is a slippery slope when the leader of a nation believes himself to be above the law. In this case it also seems that along with empire inevitably comes the “imperial presidency”.⁴¹

³⁹ Johnson 2004 p. 292

⁴⁰ Ebeling 2003 <http://www.fff.org/freedom/fd0305b.asp>

⁴¹ Ibid

According to Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, authors of the book *America Unbound*, Bush has not brought about a revolution in America's goals abroad, but rather in how to achieve them.⁴² According to the authors, these changes in policy can be boiled down to a few key principles:

- Reliance on the unilateral exercise of power rather than on international laws and institutions
- Proactive doctrine of preemption as opposed to the reactive strategies of deterrence and containment
- Regime change instead of direct negotiation with certain countries
- Downplay American support for treaty-based non-proliferation regimes
- Dependence on "coalitions of the willing" at the expense of permanent alliances
- Oppose European integration and exploit Europe's internal divisions instead⁴³

Even before 9/11, the Bush administration withdrew from important international treaties, including those seeking to ban antiballistic missile weapons, control the emission of greenhouse gases, and create a court to try perpetrators of the most heinous war crimes.⁴⁴ Bush's policies were characterized by a unilateral attitude that placed American interests ahead of foreign ones. The events of 9/11 enabled him to put his policies into action (such as when the administration decided to go to war with Iraq), rather than completely revitalize them. No matter one's opinion of the man, George W. Bush has definitely left a lasting impression on international politics.

Fundamentally, the Bush revolution in foreign policy is based on two beliefs. The first is that in a dangerous world, the best -- if not the only -- way to ensure America's security was to shed the constraints imposed by friends, allies, and international institutions.⁴⁵ Basically, the United States can't depend on others to protect itself, because nations usually ignore threats that don't directly involve them. The international laws and institutions mentioned earlier serve to limit American power rather than enhance it. The second core belief of Bush foreign policy is that an "America unbound" should use its strength to change the status quo in the world.⁴⁶ In other words, the United States should go out and seek enemies (as they did with Iraq) rather than wait for them to come (as they did on 9/11).

The beliefs mentioned above have had far-reaching consequences for US foreign policy. The preference for unilateralism has been (at least in the short term) easier and more effective in pursuing American interests abroad than multilateralism.⁴⁷ Even though now in the wake of post-war Iraq we are beginning to see the shortcomings of this policy, given the chaotic nature of

⁴² Daalder 2003 p. 2

⁴³ Ibid p. 2

⁴⁴ Johnson 2004 p. 256

⁴⁵ Daalder p. 13

⁴⁶ Ibid p. 13

⁴⁷ Ibid p. 14

Iraq and the strained attempts to establish democracy there. Another consequence is that preemption is no longer seen as a last resort.⁴⁸ In the words of George W. Bush, “If we wait for threats to materialize, we will have waited too long...In this world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action, and this nation will act”.⁴⁹

According to Daalder and Lindsay, the final consequence for American foreign policy is that now the United States should use its unprecedented power to produce regime change in so-called “rogue states” (which were mentioned earlier in the post-communism through the 1990’s section).⁵⁰ This had been done many times before, only now the US was willing to use its armed forces for the specific goal of overthrowing foreign governments, even in the absence of a direct attack on the United States. This is what Afghanistan and Iraq were all about, despite the fact that Osama Bin Ladin and the vast majority of the 9/11 hijackers were Saudi, and Sadaam Hussein constituted no direct threat to the United States. Also, this policy of pre-emption and unilateralism doesn’t work so well in cases like North Korea or Iran.

3.2 The Project for the New American Century

In order to *really* gain an understanding of the ideology underlying current American foreign policy one must become familiar with an entity known as The Project for the New American Century (PNAC). The PNAC is a neo-conservative Washington-based “think tank” that was established in 1997. Think tanks are a fairly common phenomenon, so why is the PNAC so significant? Well, the PNAC, and more specifically its “mission statement” otherwise known as “Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New American Century” form the backbone of the political ideology of the highest-ranking members of the United States government. It is important to keep in mind that this document was written in September 2002, *before* the election of Geogre W. Bush, the events of 9/11 *and* the invasion of Iraq.

This document was underwritten by such men as Dick Cheney (Vice President), Donald Rumsfeld (Secretary of Defense), Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Defense Secretary) as well as a host of others, all of whom in one way or another pull the strings of American foreign policy. It is an outline for American imperial ambitions, described by a member of the British House of Commons as “a blueprint for US world domination – a new world order of their making. These are the thought processes of fantasist Americans who want to control the world. I am

⁴⁸ Ibid p. 14

⁴⁹ Pilger 2003 p. 118

⁵⁰ Daalder 2003 p. 14

appalled that a British Labour Prime Minister (Tony Blair) should have got into bed with a crew that has this moral standing”.⁵¹

The document mentioned above is (in its own words) “a blueprint for maintaining global US preeminence, precluding the rise of a great power rival, and shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests”.⁵² Already the context is eerily reminiscent of “The Bush Doctrine” section covered earlier, only the wording is different (and more direct). Fundamentally the PNAC desires one thing, and that is the establishment of a global American empire that is dominant to all other nations. This is important seeing as how “at present the United States faces no global rival, and America’s strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position into the future as far as possible.”⁵³ The people behind the PNAC hate the idea that the United States, the last remaining superpower, does not do more by way of socioeconomic and military force to bring the rest of the world under the umbrella of a new socio-economic Pax Americana (a term which is used in the report several times).⁵⁴

According to the document, there are four core missions for United States armed forces:

- Defend the American homeland
- Fight and decisively win multiple, simultaneous major theatre wars
- Perform the “constabulatory” duties associated with shaping the security environment in critical regions
- Transform U.S. forces to exploit the “revolution in military affairs”⁵⁵

Before delving deeper into some of these core missions that are most relevant to American foreign policy, it is once again important to keep in mind that this document was written *before* George W. Bush assumed the presidency. After the events of 9/11, the powerful men behind this document saw the opportunity to turn an ideological political document into substantive policy.

The desire of the PNAC to win multiple theatre wars is incredibly relevant to the issue of American imperialism, even though if it is indicative of a much larger problem. According to Emmanuel Todd, author of *After the Empire*, the subordination of the real obstacles to American hegemony – namely the strategic players Russia, Europe, and Japan – is simply too big a job to be an accessible objective.⁵⁶ Try as it might, the United States cannot bully these countries and tell them what to do. But since America has to remain at least symbolically at the center of the world, it has to find ways to parade its superpower status.⁵⁷ Thus the development of a global theatre of dramatized militarism, or theatre wars. According to Todd, this dramatized militarism consists of three principles:

⁵¹ Mackay 2002 <http://www.sundayherald.com/27735>

⁵² Rebuilding 2000 p. ii <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>

⁵³ Ibid p. ii

⁵⁴ Pitt 2003 http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/American_Empire/Gods_Mortals_Empire.html

⁵⁵ Rebuilding 2000 p. iv <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>

⁵⁶ Todd 2004 p. 21

⁵⁷ Ibid p. 21

- Never resolve a problem once and for all, thereby justifying endless rounds of military action around the world by the world's only superpower
- Concentrate energy on minor-league powers such as Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, etc. This reflects well on American military might
- Develop new arms systems that can be advertised as putting the U.S. far ahead of the field in an arms race that must never end⁵⁸

Contrary to America's (and the PNAC's) conception of itself as an unassailable hegemon, the list and size of the adversaries mentioned above gives an objective indication of American power, since it is incapable of challenging any country more powerful than those that belong to the nefarious "Axis of Evil" (Cuba notwithstanding).⁵⁹

Another one of the core missions of the PNAC is for the United States to performing constabulary duties in order to shape the security environment in critical regions. America acting as the world's policeman in pursuit of its own interests, in other words. The PNAC believes that these duties "demand American political leadership rather than that of the United Nations...nor can the United States assume a United Nations-like stance of neutrality; the preponderance of American power is so great and its global interests so wide that it cannot be indifferent to the political outcomes in the Balkans, the Persian Gulf (or elsewhere)".⁶⁰ Keep in mind that both of these regions are rich in oil, which is of the highest priority for the American empire's "global interests". This need for American political leadership undermines the United Nations, as we have already seen when the United States basically spit on the UN with its "with us or against us" stance in the lead-up to the Iraq war.

A passage within the "Rebuilding America's Defenses" document is of utmost relevance to the "War in Iraq" section and the imperial context of this thesis. According to this document, President Bush and his cabinet planned to establish military control over the Persian Gulf irrespective of Saddam Hussein and any threat – real or imagined – that his regime may or may not have posed to the world and his own people.⁶¹ According to the document: "The United States has for decades sought to play a more permanent role in Gulf regional security. While the unresolved conflict in 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".⁶² This was written *years* before the invasion of Iraq. The events of 9/11 and the sympathies it generated gave the Bush administration the tools it needed in order to forward its imperialist agenda. By duping the American people and the world into momentarily believing in ties between Al-Qaeda and Iraq, as well as the threat posed by Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (both of which were later proven

⁵⁸ Ibid p. 21

⁵⁹ Ibid p. 21

⁶⁰ Rebuilding 2000 p. 11 <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>

⁶¹ Ahmed 2003 p. 15

⁶² Rebuilding 2000 p. 14 <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>

completely false) the Bush administration was able to advance its agenda that was already set in stone years before.

3.3 The Iraq War

”Our policy...insists on regime change in Baghdad, and that policy will not be altered, whether inspectors go in or not”.⁶³

This quote (expressed by a United States official charged with “arms control” in Iraq) was indicative of the American attitude in the buildup to Operation Iraqi Freedom. The administration had its mind made up in regards to how it wanted to advance its agenda, irrespective of protests by the United Nations or the international community at large. An objective assessment of the 2003 war on Iraq shows clearly that it was nothing less than a brazen colonial enterprise, fundamentally opposed to elementary humanitarian principles, and motivated by longstanding imperial values.⁶⁴ But on a more specific level, what was the reasoning behind the United State’s decision to go to war with Iraq a second time around? Furthermore, how does the Iraq war fit into the larger context of the advancement of an American imperialist agenda?

The general motivations for the “liberation” of Iraq were already contained within the hubris of “The Bush Doctrine” and “The Project for the New American Century”, it was just that many people failed to take notice. The spin given to the public was that Iraq posed an immediate threat to American and international security. But the real reasoning behind the war runs much deeper than that. We have already learned that key figures in the Bush administration already had Iraq in the their sights well before 9/11. They were ideologically preoccupied with Iraq for various reasons. The fervor created by 9/11, coupled with the already-established American policy towards “rogue states” (states that don’t accept the political or economic discipline of the United States), gave the Bush administration all the fuel it needed in order to advance its agenda. Iraq needed to be disciplined, because it was one of the states that was in the way of US global hegemony. In order to further understand the motivations for the war one can choose to look at it within two contexts, military and economic.

3.3.1 Military Motivations

The first context for understanding the Iraq war is military. The Bush administration had given numerous objectives and justifications for the Iraq war,

⁶³ Monbiot 2002 http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/American_Empire/Logic_Empire.html

⁶⁴ Ahmed 2003 p. 291

almost all of which were later proven false. We already know that the war was never really about weapons of mass destruction, because in the several years that the United States has occupied Iraq, not *one* weapon of mass destruction has been found. The administration also tried (and continues) to make Iraq part of the war on terror. In the hours following the 9/11 attacks, Donald Rumsfeld asked for an immediate assault on Iraq, insisting that Iraq should be "a principle target of the first round in the war against terrorism".⁶⁵ At first they attempted in earnest to establish a September 11th / Al-Qaeda / Iraq connection, which was also later proven to be bogus.

Yes, the Baathist regime was terrible and oppressive. But when the US attempted to connect Saddam with Osama Bin Laden, it created false ties between two actors whom had absolutely nothing in common other than a mutual disdain for the United States. Virtually all agreed that war would give rise to even more terrorism, not less.⁶⁶ This has been proven true as evidenced by the continuing insurgency within Iraq, with its almost daily suicide bombings and ever-rising body count. The war is not even about the liberation of an oppressed people, seeing as how killing innocent Iraqi civilians in a full frontal assault is hardly the best way to liberate a people.⁶⁷ The underlying objective of this war is the imposition of a Pax Americana on the region and installation of vassal regimes that will control restive populations.⁶⁸

Even before the war, the US had already established a massive military presence in the region. According to Joseph Wilson, the senior US diplomat in Baghdad during the first Iraq war, bases had already been established as stepping stones to Afghanistan and Iraq, but also as tripwires in countries that fear their neighbors.⁶⁹ Northern Kuwait has been ceded to American forces and a significant military presence established in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman.⁷⁰ Even before the second Iraq war nations in the region were dependent on the United States for their security. Now that the United States has established a firm foothold in Iraq, those nations know that a sudden withdrawal would throw the entire region into disarray. So in a sense they are at the mercy of the United States. A columnist asked the relevant question months before the second Iraq War began: "Why does the administration seem unconcerned about an exit strategy from Iraq once Saddam is toppled? Because we won't be leaving. Having conquered Iraq, the United States will create permanent military bases in that country from which to dominate the Middle East, including neighboring Iran."⁷¹ So in this aspect US hegemony in the region has been realized.

⁶⁵ Johnson 2004 p. 227

⁶⁶ Wilson 2003 http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/American_Empire/Republic_or_Empire.html

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Johnson 2004 p. 237

3.3.2 Economic motivations

One cannot avoid the subject of oil while discussing the war in Iraq. According to John Pilger, author of *The New Rulers of the World*, the Americans' barely hidden agenda is based on the knowledge that the world's oil supplies will peak within ten years, perhaps earlier, and then begin to decline by around two million barrels a day.⁷² A 2001 report described the significance of this decline for American power: "The world is perilously close to utilizing all its available global oil production capacity. If the global demand for oil continues to rise, world shortages could reduce the status of the the US to that of a poor developing country."⁷³ The United States is dependent on oil, and Iraq (with the world's second largest supply of oil after Saudi Arabia) represents a vast landscape of untapped potential for American oil interests. As evidence of oil being the prime motivation behind the Iraq War, one only needs to observe the behavior of American troops when they first entered Baghdad as "liberators". They very effectively protected the headquarters of Iraq's Ministry of Oil but were indifferent to looters who spent two days ransacking the National Museum of its priceless antiquities and burning the national archives and the city's famed Quranic library.⁷⁴

In addition to consolidating its control of the world's second largest oil supply, the United States also seeks to create an ideal economy that is completely privatized and foreign-owned. Transfer of public goods to private hands in Iraq is intended as an initial step in widespread privatization in the region.⁷⁵ So not only does the United States intend to establish widespread military control over The Middle East (as covered in the previous section), but economic control as well. Tim Carney, senior adviser to the Iraqi ministry of industry and minerals, said the coalition planned to start privatizations as soon as an interim administration was in place and heralded privatization as "the right direction for twenty-first-century Iraq."⁷⁶ This is the same form of neo-imperialism that was mentioned earlier in this thesis. Rather than being directly colonized by the United States, Iraq has been granted the trappings of sovereignty -- while Western finance capital retains control of the lion's share of its profitable resources. The United States is seeking to recreate Iraq in line with corporate interests. Almost overnight, Baghdad has been turned into a vast emporium of imported goods in a McDonaldized Iraq, ruled by western overlords and serviced by US corporations.⁷⁷

The United States also possesses a vast military-industrial complex that is in constant need of conflict in order to justify its staggeringly expensive existence.⁷⁸

⁷² Pilger 2003 p. 118

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Johnson 2004 p. 234

⁷⁵ Mittal 2003 http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/American_Empire/OpenFire_OpenMarkets.html

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Monbiot 2002 http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/American_Empire/Logic_Empire.html

Forty cents in every tax dollar ends up with the Pentagon, which, in the financial year 2001/2002 spent more than \$400 billion (this figure is even higher now).⁷⁹ And what better way to keep business “booming” than war? Or better yet, a seemingly endless “war on terror”? The hawks who control the White House perceive that perpetual war results in the perpetual demand for their services, and that they will win, whoever loses.⁸⁰

Former executives, consultants or shareholders of top U.S. defense companies pervade the Bush national security team.⁸¹ Lockheed Martin, the nation's largest defense contractor, has more connections to the Bush administration than any other major defense contractor -- eight current policy makers had direct or indirect ties to the company before joining the administration.⁸² Northrop Grumman, which is now the nation's third largest defense contractor, follows closely behind Lockheed with seven former officials, consultants or shareholders in the Bush administration.⁸³ The list goes on and on. What we are witness to now in Iraq is a direct consequence of what Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th president of the United States, warned against in his farewell address. “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”⁸⁴

3.4 The War on Terror

"The most important thing is for us to find Osama bin Laden. It is our number one priority and we will not rest until we find him."
- George W. Bush, September 13, 2001⁸⁵

The “War on Terror” can be viewed with suspicious eyes. The search for Osama Bin Laden and his henchmen in the mountains of Afghanistan can be perceived as a cover for a much more far-reaching plan. On the pretext of fighting against international terrorism, the US government is in reality attempting to expand and consolidate its global preeminence in accordance with longstanding strategies that have been contemplated and elaborated over a series of decades.⁸⁶ The ultimate goal is an American conquest of the The Middle East region, both military and economic, that has been in the works since the end of World War II. This conquest has no endpoint until the United States has established itself as the master of the world’s remaining oil and gas.

⁷⁹ Pilger 2003 p. 134

⁸⁰ Monbiot 2002 http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/American_Empire/Logic_Empire.html

⁸¹ Hartung & Ciarrocca 2003 <http://multinationalmonitor.org/mm2003/03jan-feb/jan-feb03corp2.html>

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Eisenhower 1961 <http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/indust.html>

⁸⁵ Karen 2002 http://www.buzzflash.com/contributors/2002/11/13_Laden.html

⁸⁶ Ahmed 2003 p. 3

First of all, the Afghanistan region is critical to US oil and gas interests. In order to transport these natural resources away from the Caspian region to deep-water ports, there are three routes a pipeline can go through: Russia, Iran or Afghanistan.⁸⁷ Cooperation between Russia and the United States is an oxymoron, and Iran is a charter member of the diabolical “axis of evil”. So that leaves Afghanistan. Indeed, in the mid-1990’s the newly-minted Taliban government was even courted by Washington. Taliban leaders were flown to Texas, then governed by George W. Bush, and entertained in Houston by senior executives of the oil company Unocal (United Oil of California).⁸⁸ A Clinton administration official commented that Afghanistan would become “like Saudi Arabia”, an oil colony with no democracy and the legal persecution of women. “We can live with that,” he said.⁸⁹ Needless to say, later terrorist attacks against American targets by the Taliban-supported Al-Qaeda organization caused any deals to fall through. The United States lost patience and concluded that “regime change” was in order.⁹⁰ Then 9/11 came along and we all know the rest.

By now we know that the 9/11 attacks did not “change everything”. In actuality, they accelerated a series of events that was already taking place. The conventional wisdom portrays the 9/11 attacks and previous such terrorist atrocities against the US and Western targets in a false historical light that isolates such events from the wider context of Western policy in the non-Western world.⁹¹ In order to legitimize the “War on Terror” in the eyes of the public, the Bush administration has adopted an “us versus them” mentality. America portrays itself as the beacon of freedom and democracy throughout the world engaged in a titanic, never-ending struggle against the forces of evil epitomized by the inherently evil and barbaric terrorists that hate America because it is a “force for good”. Unfortunately a large segment of the American population still thinks in these black and white terms, but even the most novice of political scientists know that motivations for terrorism are never that simple.

A central aspect of the war on terror is the threat posed by Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is a fluid non-state international network of terrorist cells which has tentacles all over the world, and yet due to its fluidity remains as elusive as ever.⁹² And such international Islamic terrorism, the reach of which is indefinite and the defeat of which is indeterminable, provides a permanent spectre of imminent doom that is highly convenient for a US government which plans to conduct worldwide operations to expand and consolidate its hegemony.⁹³ It is indeed evocative of George Orwell’s prophetic novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where we are to live with the threat and illusion of endless war in order to justify increased social control and state repression, while great power pursues its goal of global

⁸⁷ Pilger 2003 p. 111

⁸⁸ Ibid p. 112

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Johnson 2003 p. 180

⁹¹ Ahmed 2003 p. 2

⁹² Ibid p. 13

⁹³ Ibid

supremacy.⁹⁴ So now, instead of the malignant global threat to the very existence of Western civilization otherwise known as Communism, we have the ever-present threat of terrorism to conveniently take its place. Coincidence? Hardly.

Taking all this into consideration, international terrorism plays a functional role in world order under US hegemony. Without terrorist Osama, President Bush would have no permanent world-wide target and thus no legitimacy for the “War on Terror”. Or maybe not.

"I don't know where bin Laden is. I have no idea and really don't care. It's not that important. It's not our priority."

- George W. Bush, March 13, 2002⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Pilger 2003 p. 1

⁹⁵ Karen 2002 http://www.buzzflash.com/contributors/2002/11/13_Laden.html

4 The Future of the American Empire

It seems that sooner or later every empire risks falling victim to something called “imperial overstretch”. Being a hegemon, America is no different. Hegemons have lots of power and because there is no countervailing force to stop them, they are tempted to use it repeatedly, and thereby overreach themselves.⁹⁶ As they begin to decline, the dominant powers almost invariably resort to war and belligerency, thereby accelerating their demise as they waste their national treasuries on military spending to the detriment of their economies and their peoples.⁹⁷ This is what we have been witness to with the American Empire.

As the American Empire has grown, it has expanded its wealth and its military which is needed in order to protect that wealth and make new conquests. America’s far-reaching “empire of bases” (as characterized by Chalmers Johnson) constitutes the latter-day equivalent of the colonies, dominions and protectorates that defined empire in days of old. As of September 2001, the Department of Defense acknowledged at least 725 American military bases outside the United States.⁹⁸ But as the American Empire has become increasingly larger, it has needed to devote more of its economic production to the military costs that are required to maintain and expand its power. It seems as if America is heading down the road of imperial overstretch, because the cost of maintaining its military power is more than the American economy can sustain. And according to Emmanuel Todd, as well as numerous other scholars, sustainable power ultimately results from a strong economy rather than a strong military. Ultimately, the hegemonic decline we are seeing now has resulted from a combination of external and internal factors: over-extension abroad (imperial overstretch) and domestic economic weakness (endless budget and balance-of-payments deficits).⁹⁹

The United States, which has traditionally been perceived as maintaining the international order, now seems to paradoxically be contributing to disorder throughout the world. The current situation in Iraq is symbolic of this. During 2003, the United States may have been ready *militarily* for a war in Iraq, even for wars in North Korea and Iran, but it was unprepared economically for even one of them, much less all three, or—equally important—their aftermaths.¹⁰⁰ The United States doesn’t have the means to achieve its imperial ambitions. Consequently, today we see axis-of-evil nations defying the Bush Doctrine and driving toward

⁹⁶ Layne 2003 http://www.amconmag.com/10_06_03/cover.html

⁹⁷ Burbach 2003 <http://www.redress.btinternet.co.uk/rburbach19.htm>

⁹⁸ Johnson 2004 p. 4

⁹⁹ Layne 2003 http://www.amconmag.com/10_06_03/cover.html

¹⁰⁰ Johnson 2004 p. 306

nuclear weapons, Iraqis rising up to expel the American “liberators”, Muslim fanatics slipping into Iraq to attack American soldiers, and alienated allies sitting back and relishing watching the “American hyper-power” thrash about.¹⁰¹

The “theatre war” in Iraq is indicative of the American Empire’s current strength. The United States has shown itself unable to maintain control over a “minor-league” power like Iraq, despite the fact that the war began as a preemptive strike against a third-world country that was already ruined after a decade-long economic embargo imposed after the end of the first Iraq war. Furthermore, lack of resources has made it impossible for the United States to devise a viable plan for reconstruction, which has opened the way for permanent economic and military chaos. The administration’s U-turn decision to ask for United Nations help in Iraq, and President George W. Bush’s request that Congress appropriate \$87 billion to fund the occupation and reconstruction of that country sent a very clear message: the administration’s Iraq policy is a fiasco.¹⁰²

As already mentioned in the “PNAC” section of this essay, the United States is pretending to remain the world’s indispensable superpower by attacking relatively insignificant opponents. Washington believes that if it doesn’t exert its force, the United States will become increasingly marginalized.¹⁰³ Unable to control the real powers of its day (Japan, Europe and Russia) America has resorted to making a show of empire by pursuing military and diplomatic actions among a series of puny powers dubbed for dramatic effect “the axis of evil” and more generally the Arab world – the point of intersection of these two axes, evil and Arab, being Iraq.¹⁰⁴ But the policies of the Bush administration have in fact resulted in a rapid decline in the international status of the US around the globe. This belligerent militarism of the United States has resulted in blowback in the form of the disillusionment of the three major powers mentioned above and led to them forging closer ties with each other. China, Russia and Europe already view the drive for US global pre-eminence with extreme distaste verging on firm opposition, implicating the prospect of their fevered attempts to counter US policy.¹⁰⁵ Every step taken by the Americans to extend their control over the planet turns out to create new problems for them.¹⁰⁶

The American Empire is also bound to experience other forms of blowback. If the United States continues on its present course, it will once and for all signal the irrelevance of the normative institutions of world order since 1945 (i.e. international law and the United Nations), giving rise to a new world dis-order of international anarchy consisting of new arms races, unprecedented proliferation and the emboldening of new and existing terrorist networks.¹⁰⁷ In turn this will endanger US security rather than strengthen it.

¹⁰¹ Buchanan 2003 http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=33674

¹⁰² Layne 2003 http://www.amconmag.com/10_06_03/cover.html

¹⁰³ Ahmed 2003 p. 265

¹⁰⁴ Todd 2004 p. 193

¹⁰⁵ Ahmed 2003 p. 266

¹⁰⁶ Todd 2004 p. 195

¹⁰⁷ Ahmed 2003 p. 266

According to Emmanuel Todd, the real war that America is fighting is not about terrorism, but economics. The country is battling to maintain its status as the world's financial center by making a symbolic show of its military might in the heart of Eurasia, thereby hoping to forget and have others ignore America's industrial weakness, its financial needs, and its predatory character.¹⁰⁸ The Congressional Budget Office projects federal deficits over the next five years (as of 2004) of a staggering \$1.08 trillion, on top of an existing government debt in February 2003 of \$6.4 trillion.¹⁰⁹ On top of this federal deficit is the enormous trade deficit. The balance of trade went from a deficit of \$100 billion in 1990 to \$500 billion annually at present.¹¹⁰ Eventually the United States will succumb to decreasing productivity, dissipate, consume too much and live high and beyond its means, thereby falling further behind technologically and deeper in debt financially.¹¹¹ Over time, America's internal fiscal troubles will erode its economic power—which is the foundation of its military might—and, as the relative power gap between the U.S. and potential new great powers begins to shrink, the costs and risks of challenging the United States will decrease and the pay-off for doing so will increase.¹¹²

Taking all things into consideration, America seems to be on an ideological and diplomatic decline in light of recent events. The United States is no longer seen as the leader of the free world, but rather acts as a “rogue state” itself. The United States went to war in Iraq despite widespread United Nations opposition and in flagrant violation of international law. Furthermore, after every defection of one of America's allies during the diplomatic crisis that preceded the war in Iraq, Washington was unable to force compliance or exact retribution for one simple reason: American no longer has the economic and financial resources to back up its foreign policy objectives.¹¹³ According to Todd, true power is economic power, and that is what America lacks today. Given this fact, all that the American Empire can do to remain relevant and at the center of the world stage is to engage in one belligerent action after another against minor-league powers like Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

¹⁰⁸ Todd 2004 p. XVIII

¹⁰⁹ Johnson 2004 p. 307

¹¹⁰ Senn, Lautenschlager 2003 http://dominionpaper.ca/features/2003/the_conceited_empire.html

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Layne 2003 http://www.amconmag.com/10_06_03/cover.html

¹¹³ Todd 2004 p. XXI

5 Conclusion

One can see that the American Empire is on the decline, despite the ongoing efforts of the Bush administration to prove otherwise. But this fall from grace does not rest solely on their shoulders. As we have been able to see, this descent initially began during the 1970's primarily due to economic factors. In addition, an overexpenditure in the defense sector coupled with other imperial ills such as blowback in its various guises served to set a spark that was to become readily apparent imperial overstretch a quarter century later. So in this respect, the Bush administration has only been a catalyst to speed up a course of events that has been progressing since the end of World War II. Throughout the last half century, America has always been a great superpower that has sought to further expand the reaches of its empire. But until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States was still a circumscribed behemoth that was counter-balanced by communist Russia. During the Cold War, the United States expanded its imperial ambitions under the guise of stemming the tide of communism. Once the Soviet Union was gone, the American Empire no longer had anything to restrain it from pursuing its interests. But it still needed a pretext to present the world that would allow it to continue its expansion and hegemonic dominance. So instead of the continuing "red menace", America was now faced with threats – both real and imagined – such as rogue states, weapons of mass destruction, and Islamic terrorism. Even though these threats are grave and terrifying, they have now become propaganda more than anything. These ever-present threats, coupled with recent events such as 9/11, gave the American Empire all the excuses it needed to further impose its will on the world. Only now it seems that the United States has begun to take on more than it can handle. As great empires have in the past, American now seems set to become a victim of its own imperial temptations.

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