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Editor's Note

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EDITOR'S NOTE

The Peace Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 is assumed to have had at least three significant and lasting consequences. First, it brought to a close the most horrid of the bloodletting between the two great camps of Western Christianity—the Catholic and Protestant faithful. Second, the Treaty underscored the rise of the nation-state, which was marked by the supersession of procedures of political rule over ecclesiastical authority. Third, the primacy of the nation-state, in turn, opened up nationalist fervor and fierce competition for glory to such an extent that international transactions were considered to be at the mercy of a chaotic and dangerous political environment. In time, the latter, in an appropriation of a particular rendition of Nicolo Machiavelli's propositions in *The Prince*, crystallized into a dominant paradigm that popularly came to be known as "Realism."¹ The fundamental postulate of realism was, and still is, this: Given the absence of a supreme sovereign and, therefore, the lawless nature of the world, a nation-state should premise its approach on seeing all alliances as soft and held together by a temporary convergence of interests. As a result, a nation-state that aspires not only to survive but to flourish in such an unreliable, if not deadly, context ought to marshal its military, economic, political, and other resources and bring that strength to bear as situations demand.

Not surprisingly, the acceleration of the competitive drive among the nation-states immediately ignited a frenzied debate about war and peace that continues in our day. In an age closer to our own than the ancient or medieval periods, and with the clamor over national interests rising to an aggressive crescendo, two voices articulated different perspectives that are equally at home in contemporary discussions over the nature of international affairs. In what has become a famous and classical intervention, Immanuel Kant made the case for the imperatives of cosmopolitan belonging or a universal community:

The alien...may request the right to be a permanent visitor (and it would require a special charitable agreement to make him/her a fellow inhabitant for a certain period), but the right to visit, to associate, belongs to all humans by virtue of their common ownership of the earth's surface; for since the earth is a globe, they cannot scatter indefinitely, but must, finally, tolerate living in close proximity.²

Kant's cosmic call was counterposed by another German thinker, Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Stressing the unavoidability of *realpolitik*, he proffered that the primary aim was "to unite the politics of international power and internal dictatorship, after the world is conquered by a single sovereign, the only means of ensuring peace."³ That those differing interpretations and axiologies were not limited to isolated individual thinkers is abundantly testified by the numerous wars between nation-states, the rise and fall of modern empires, decolonization, and the various attempts to structure the affairs of the world through the cultivation of supra-subjectivities and their correlate institutions. In addition to attempts at the level of regions, examples of the latter efforts include the League of Nations and the United Nations Organization. Currently, these older concerns are complicated by the end of the Cold War and the onset of the latest versions of globalization.⁴

The birth of the United States of America, its evolution, rise to global power, and contemporary dominance of the world stage are at once intertwined with the history of the rest of the world and the renderings that accompany each phase. For instance, in its inception, some deemed the United States as the antithesis of both a Europe, simultaneously burdened with repressive local structures and habits and endless quarrels that often ushered in destructive wars, and other, more alien, zones shrouded in "primitive" cultures. Subsequently, the American Declaration of Independence and constitutionalism were thrust forth and sanctified as unparalleled achievements to be emulated by a society ambitious enough to cross into the millennium of beckoning freedom and economic prosperity. More specifically, deep-shadowing of its brutal domestic contradictions notwithstanding,⁵ this sense of the American collective identity was increasingly wedded to a religious (particularly Protestant) conviction—one that stipulated that the rest of the world ought to be awakened to this newly found path to modernization. Here lies the origin of a complex fusion of what becomes, in Anatole Liener's apt term, the "American Thesis." At the heart of this belief is, on the one hand, a preference to keep America's distance from the contagions of the afflicted and, on the other, a contradictory propensity to want to turn others into a replica of self.

American culture historically has embodied a strong strain of isolationism. This isolationism is, however, a complex phenomenon which should not be understood simply as a desire to withdraw from the world. Rather, American isolationism forms another face of both American chauvinism

and American Messianism, in the form of a belief in America as a unique city on a hill. As a result, it is closely related to nationalist unilateralism in international affairs, since it forms part of a view that if the United States really has no choice at all but to involve itself with disgusting and inferior foreigners, it must absolutely control the process and must under no circumstances subject itself to foreign control or even advice.⁶

An assumed triumph of America's values over the "alternative" that had culminated in the conclusion of the Cold War reinforced national self-righteousness, with overconfidence in the country's "unique" place in the design of the future. Then the shocking events of September 11, 2001, took place. The immediate impact on the consciousness of the American people and policymakers was, to say the least, so startling that a new and contumacious debate started.⁷ On one side were those who had articulated a grim vision of the post-Cold War time—one, they say, in which an unmistakable Manichean line has been drawn that separates a virtuous United States from a demonic Islamic terrorist network, with supporting states hateful of individual liberty, market economy, and technological progress.⁸ Reviving the "American Creed," these commentators and their policy-making cohorts within the Bush Administration set the basis for the quick production of the National Security Strategy of 2002.⁹ As the discourse revolved around how best the United States might engage the rest of the world, this perspective stressed the necessity of beefing up and subsequently using American strength. "In deploying American power," urges Max Boot, "decision makers should be less apologetic, less hesitant, less humble."¹⁰ Furthermore, this advocacy for the bold use of overwhelming might simultaneously made the case for an unquestionable rectitude of American hegemony over the rest of the world. Put differently, it is said that an empire of the American type was a much needed antidote in the face of an ascending and violent disorder.¹¹ Naturally, such a drumbeating for unilateralism generated at least two, though somewhat different, dissenting voices.¹² One belongs to those who, while supportive of American supremacy in world affairs, advocate a multilateral strategy that still leaves plenty of room for the defense of the national interest. Joseph Nye conceptualizes this tack as a result of an intelligent mix of "hard" and "soft" power.¹³ By far the most formidable reaction to the unilateralist and imperialist sentiments comes in two guises. The first is an epistemological-cum-ethical challenge to those whose writings propagate new imperial interventions, particularly in the global South,

as positive acts to assuage threatening turbulence. Such convulsions are often ascribed to the harrowing conditions caused by bust up states and the liabilities inherent in those societies. In an incisive response to Michael Ignatieff's dismissal of the horrid legacies of earlier imperialism so as to create legitimacy for the new versions, Rahul Rao asserts:

When Western academics express impatience at imputations of historical responsibility for colonialism, they in effect arbitrarily impose a statute of limitations on discussion of old empire, even as others in the academy...open new chapters in this evolving story. The convergence of this whitewashing of old imperialism, limitations of its moral responsibility and advocacy of new imperialism has fueled a profoundly disturbing renewal of enthusiasm for empire in the Western academy today.¹⁴

The other response emanates from the combined contributions of a cluster of scholars.¹⁵ They point to the folly of empire, America's more than 725 overseas military bases and other kinds of power notwithstanding. Here, an emphasis is put upon what is taken to be a deep corrosion of domestic civil liberties and economic well-being, alienation of traditional allies, and insecurities that inevitably accompany the hijacking and perversion of other peoples' histories as well as the consequent frustration of their aspirations in the more transparent age of technological globalization.

In the end, as American hyperpower plays itself out in the world arena and in intimate encounters with other societies, all buffeted by the gale winds of the epoch, the debate over the United States' role would only intensify in the coming years. At the core of that conversation is the nature of the relationship between the United States (and, to a lesser extent, the European Union in-progress) with the vast universe of the global South. This singling out of the United States is appropriate, given the fact that it will be at the center of global power for a significant part of this new century. To construct a mutually enabling dialogue and concrete interactions seems, at first blush and seductively, as relatively simple as a matter of mere communication. Alas, it is more daunting to such an extent that one could identify the challenge as the most difficult of all the tasks that confront the current human civilization. Seen in its full scope and ramifications returns us, then, to the clairvoyance of Kant. A contemporary version of that universalist imperative has been cogently expressed by Susan Buck-Morss:

In the global sphere, tolerance is the first criteria; we cannot be placed on the defensive because of who we are. Freedom to dissent is the second; we need to be able to criticize power that is inhuman in its effects, regardless of those who exercise it. The third criterion defines the goal to trust each other politically and act together, even when the languages in which we speak our moral concerns not only differ, but seem to be in open contradiction... . What is needed is to rethink the entire project of politics within the changed conditions of a global public sphere—and do this democratically, as people who speak different political languages, but whose goals are nonetheless the same: global peace, economic justice, legal equality, democratic participation, individual freedom, mutual respect.¹⁶

With these most crucial issues at stake, a blunt but respectful discussion of America's interaction with the world, and from variable perspectives, seems an appropriate place to begin.

We start the Roundtable with the opening essay by **Niall Ferguson**. His thrust confirms the United States as a global empire indispensable for an age in need of order, "the necessary precondition for liberty." However, he argues, this will not be easy because a successful imperial leadership requires competent management of the resources at home and intelligent understanding of the world.

The second session is set around **Tariq Ali's** fierce challenge to both the arguments put forth by Ferguson and what he sees as arrogant and aggressive but untenable foreign policies of the United States. **Anna Kläppe** agrees with much of Ali's perspective but chides him for underselling the necessity of creating effective multilateral organizations—including strengthening the United Nations. **Mark Davis** is appreciative of Ali's capacity to historicize America's current policies and concurs with Ali's characterization of U.S. foreign policy-making as often ill conceived and myopic. Nonetheless, Davis asks for more judicious and new ideas that could bring relief to those societies caught up in the grip of "failing states" or brutal dictatorships.

The third conversation is organized around **Michael Ledeen's** essay. His meditations reaffirm the school of thought that has seen the U.S.A. as a totally "different kind of country." He asserts that the struggle against terror is a new phenomenon imposed on the United States with the events of September 11, 2001. In that context, he bluntly calls

for a “regime challenge” across the Middle East, with the exception of Israel, and particularly in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Jesse Uggla agrees with the point that the United States has some unique characteristics. Moreover, he is sympathetic to the argument that American leadership has “mismanaged” the response to terrorism. But Uggla contests the wisdom of using American military force and, instead, advocates an imaginative use of “soft power.” Emily Rosenberg’s bold intervention takes Ledeen to task on multiple and critical points. From interpretation of the history of American foreign relations to Ledeen’s recommended policy towards Iran, Rosenberg offers a powerful counter-narrative as well as sounds the alarm over the menace of “imperial hubris.”

The upcoming twelfth annual Macalester International Roundtable partakes of the 400th Anniversary of the appearance of *Don Quixote*. The theme will be “Quixotic Offspring: The Global Legacy of *Don Quixote*.”

Notes

1. Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1939); Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 6th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1985); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); and Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).
2. Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphreys (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), p. 118. A contemporary position similar to that of Kant can be found in David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); D. Heater, *World Citizenship* (London: Continuum, 2002); Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Johan Galtung, “Global Governance For and By Global Democracy,” *Macalester International*, Vol. 1 (St. Paul, Minnesota, Spring 1995): 15–39; and Peter Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
3. Quoted in Alain Joxe, *Empire of Disorder*, trans. Ames Hodges (New York: Semiotext(E), 2002), p. 191. Also, Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).
4. Further readings on globalization include Rich Falk, *Predatory Globalization: A Critique* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999); James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Amy Chua, *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (New

York: Anchor Books, 2004); and Tyler Cowen, *Creative Destruction: How Globalization is Changing the World's Cultures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

5. On this highly underplayed dimension of the making of the United States, see Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Conflict in North America, 1500–2000* (New York: Atlantic, 2004).

6. Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 3. In a similar vein, nearly two generations ago, a major American scholar asserted:

When one's ultimate values are accepted wherever one turns, the absolute language of self-evidence comes easily enough. This then is the mood of America's absolutism: the sober faith that its norms are self-evident. It is one of the most powerful absolutisms in the world... It was so sure of itself that it hardly needed to become articulate, so secure that it could actually support a pragmatism which seemed on the surface to belie it. American pragmatism has always been deceptive because, glacierlike, it has rested on miles of submerged conviction, and the conformitarian ethos which that conviction generates has always been infuriating because it refuses to pay its critics the compliment of an argument.

Luis Hertz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), pp. 58–59.

7. Many commentators jumped quickly to express a predictable, though understandable, mixture of grief and anger. Here is a different and more profound contribution:

It is too soon, I believe, to really understand what happened to America on September 11 and the days that followed, but I could tentatively venture that we Americans received that day the curse and the blessing of being able to look at ourselves in a way that had been denied to most of us our whole lives, of experiencing the terror and victimhood that so many other inhabitants of this planet have had to wade through day after day since birth.

Ariel Dorfman, *Other Septembers, Many Americas: Selected Provocations, 1980–2004* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004), pp. xv–xvi.

8. James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

9. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002).

10. Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

11. Sebastian Mallaby, "The Reluctant Imperialist: Terrorism, Failed States, and the Case for American Empire," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 2 (2002); Dinesh D'Souza, "In Praise of American Empire," *The Christian Science Monitor* (April 26, 2002); and Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (London: Vintage, 2003) and "The Way We Live Now: The Year of Living Dangerously," *The New York Times Magazine* (March 14, 2004). Here, it is important to distinguish between the hard-liners' call for an American imperial supremacy and those less jingoistic described as "liberal imperialists." Ignatieff is an example of the latter. He writes:

In old imperialism, the empire had a single capital, and its objectives were opposed to those of every other empire. In the new humanitarian empire, power

is exercised as a condominium, with Washington in the lead, and London, Paris, Berlin and Tokyo following reluctantly behind... The humanitarian empire is the new face of an old figure: the democratic free world, the Christian West.

Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*, p. 17.

To compare this reading of imperialism to new and ghastly revelations of the record of British state behavior in colonial Kenya in the 1950s, see David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2004); and Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004).

12. Even traditional conservative thinkers and practitioners are aghast over the intensity of the "neoconservative" call to a unilateralist posture. Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservative and World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

13. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

14. Rahul Rao, "The Empire Writes Back (to Michael Ignatieff)," *Millennium* 33, no. 1 (2004): 145–166.

15. Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); Robert Jay Lifton, *Superpower Syndrome: America's Apocalyptic Confrontation with the World* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003); Emmanuel Todd, *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); and Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Random House, 2004).

16. Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Post Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 4–5. Also, see Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) and Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Oxford: Polity, 2004).