

In These Pages

by James Kurth

In the early 2000s, writers on international affairs spent considerable time discussing the potential, and even the necessity, for establishing a global American hegemony or empire. It seemed to some that only this could provide world order and stability against the growing threats presented by rogue states such as Iraq, Iran, and North Korea; by nuclear proliferation to these states; by transnational terrorist networks; and especially by the combination of these threats into some kind of terrible alliance, or axis of evil. On the way to establishing its global hegemony, it was thought, the United States would on occasion have to engage in preemptive or unilateral uses of military force. But the positive objective and the legitimating principle of the force and the hegemony would be the U.S. democratization project—the progressive spread of liberal democracy, free markets, and open societies, especially within the Muslim world. The first fruit of this grand vision of U.S. hegemony and democracy was, of course, the Iraq War.

Reinventing the Hegemonic and Democratic Vision

We are now three years into the Iraq War, and the grueling experience there has done much to damage, diminish, and, for many Americans, even discredit and destroy this hegemonic and democratic vision. It is an appropriate time to reexamine, and perhaps to reinvent, the major foreign policy ideas and issues concerning hegemony, empire, rogue states, terrorist networks, preemption, unilateralism, nuclear proliferation, and democratization. This issue of *Orbis* is dedicated to this undertaking.

Jakub Grygiel presents an innovative and realistic view of how an effective empire must work. Rather than undertaking unilateral actions legitimated by abstract principles such as liberal democracy, serious imperial powers need to attract many different allies, each of which might have very different interests. It takes a disciplined and diligent—but absolutely necessary—effort to maintain an alliance. Colin Dueck provides a similarly innovative and realistic view of

how a great power can effectively deal with a variety of rogue states. As with an imperial power's allies, so too with its enemies: each target state has its own distinct strengths and weaknesses, and different states require different policies. Dueck also provides ways to discern these differences and to determine which policy is best for each target.

The U.S. democratization project has produced an energetic debate among political analysts. In recent issues of *Orbis*, several authors, including myself, have been very critical of democratization. In this issue, Anatol Lieven extends such criticism into a deep and incisive probing of the inherent contradictions and omissions found among liberal internationalists. However, there are also contradictions and omissions to be found among critics of democratization. Bruce Gilley, an experienced and eloquent advocate of democracy-promotion, gives a comprehensive and perceptive critique of the critics and also a defense of the project.

Finally, a distinguished historian of America's role in the world, David Hendrickson, shows us what the real American tradition is in regard to the current topics of hegemony, preemption, and unilateralism. His article gives a full account of these phenomena as they actually occurred during the first half-century of U.S. foreign policy, from Independence to the Mexican War. Hendrickson specifically offers an alternative interpretation to the influential one given by John

Lewis Gaddis in *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (2004).

Reinventing U.S. Military Policy

The grinding U.S. counter-insurgency war in Iraq has certainly made discussions of U.S. military policy much more sober than they were in the first flush of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's "transformation project" in 2001–02. Two of our articles present up-to-date but contrasting accounts of contemporary military policy and proposals for change. Charles Peña argues that the main threat to the United States comes from terrorist networks, but that a strategy of off-shore balancing combined with a smaller, less intrusive military would be the best way to meet this threat. Conversely, Mackubin Owens believes that the United States confronts a wide variety of threats, that it must still seek to establish a liberal world order (i.e., hegemony), and that it needs a large and balanced military to do this.

One of the newest and biggest changes in U.S. military policy—and one of the least understood—is the U.S. government's increasing use of private security companies (PSCs). The use of PSCs has been especially massive in Iraq, where private security forces amount to more than 20,000 personnel, about one-sixth the number of U.S. military personnel there. Deborah Avant, a leading expert on this important development in international security, provides us with a comprehensive, informative, and relevant assessment of this trend and its implications.

The Challenges of Nuclear Proliferation

Despite (or perhaps because of) the Iraq War, nuclear proliferation has continued on its way, but in contrasting ways and in different countries. On the one hand, a major U.S. enemy, North Korea, has already acquired several nuclear weapons and is intent on producing many more. What the United States can do about this is a major issue. Like Colin Dueck in his article on rogue states, Chadwick Smith, in his article on North Korea, believes that U.S. military action to abort the North Korean nuclear-weapons program is no longer possible or practical. He proposes instead U.S. economic actions—“strategic entanglement”—that would slowly but steadily transform the North Korean economy and then, as in other communist states in the 1980s, transform the North Korean regime.

On the other hand, a new and major U.S. ally, India, is increasing its own reliance upon nuclear power, both for nuclear weapons and for nuclear energy. A recent nuclear agreement between India and the United States tries to balance

both the promise and the peril of nuclear proliferation to U.S. allies. Manohar Thyagaraj and Raju Thomas provide us with an informative and perceptive analysis of this complex development and dilemma.

Finally, the authors of our two review essays are also active participants in the current debate about rethinking U.S. foreign and military policy. Bruce Berkowitz reviews a major history of the National Security Council and another work about Washington’s current foreign policy choices. Similarly, Justin Logan reviews two books by a prominent Pentagon advocate of U.S. military intervention to promote globalization, along with another, contrasting work, which advocates a new version of the traditional realist approach toward foreign policy. The deepening difficulties that the United States confronts in its war in Iraq and in its broader war with Islamist terrorists have wonderfully concentrated the minds of policy analysts on fundamental ideas and issues. It may be a dismal time in the history of U.S. foreign and military policy, but it is certainly a lively era in policy debate.

