

---

# Review Essays

---

## **The Mechanics of Empire by John Hillen**

**John Hillen** ([jhillen@fpri.org](mailto:jhillen@fpri.org)) is a trustee of the Foreign Policy Research Institute and director of its Program on National Security. He is a contributing editor at *National Review*.

Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk* (New York: Knopf, 2004) \$19.95

Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004) \$25.95

Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the 21st Century* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003) \$18.95

Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004) \$21

James Dobbins, et al., *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2003) \$35

Just as it took a few years after World War II for the nature of the Cold War and the strategy of containment to become evident,<sup>1</sup> so too the reality of the Bush doctrine and the practicalities of waging a war on terrorism and promoting democratization and globalization are only now becoming clearer. As active as the United States has been over the past three years, the operating tenets and mechanics of a durable grand strategy have yet to come.

The books under consideration here address that dilemma. They all explicitly accept what has come to be the general principle of American grand strategy: that the surest way to attain lasting security is for the United States to enlarge the community of nations and other groups that generally ascribe to liberal political and economic values. The best way to rid the world of mosquitoes and alligators is to drain the swamp and build condos. Indeed,

---

<sup>1</sup>George Kennan's famous "Sources of Soviet Conduct" article was published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1947 and containment formalized as U.S. strategy a year later.

Walter Russell Mead, the diplomatic historian among the authors, maintains that in one form or another this policy has been the animating feature of U.S. foreign policy since the nation's founding. Nonetheless, the authors have strikingly divergent viewpoints on how this should be carried out. Moreover, when one peels back the layers of this accepted liberal thinking, one gets to the crux of the matter—exactly how is the United States to build like-minded entities in the parts of the world that are developing, disintegrating, stagnating, fragmenting, or in outright collapse?

### **U.S. Grand Strategy**

All these authors accept the triumph (or at least promise) of globalization as what *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman called the world's "North Star." To them, 9/11 didn't derail globalization; it simply revealed the dark underside of some of those who resisted it. They all agree that the incomplete "march of freedom"<sup>2</sup> has bifurcated the world between the modern and postmodern states, which enjoy liberal political and economic orders, and the failed, failing, or collapsed entities that resist globalization.<sup>3</sup>

Niall Ferguson, the British economic historian, notes that "economic globalization is working," with international inequality narrowing. But because the citizens of some nations are cut off from participating in it, "economic globalization needs to be underwritten politically, as it was a century ago." But who is to take up the challenge? The authors, even committed multilateralist Robert Cooper, agree that the UN or other current supranational bodies cannot take the lead. As Mead puts it, "to be effective, institutions must reflect power realities." Moreover, almost all of today's international institutions were built for a world that no longer exists. No matter how much one may tinker with them, it is hard to fit up the UN, NATO, the WTO, the IMF and others to provide security against rogue states and stateless terrorists, to sustain the spread of good governance, and to protect and enlarge the liberal economic order.

All authors (Cooper less so) recognize that the United States must take the lead on underpinning a new international order built on the liberal principles of globalization. Ferguson makes the strongest case for an unabashedly muscular American imperialism, but all note that any strategy to meet these challenges will be immeasurably more effective if undertaken in concert with a diverse set of partners and through institutions that reflect cooperation and collaboration. As Mead states, "The international order the United States has built since World War II is stronger, more effective, and less vulnerable to

<sup>2</sup> "The terrorists are fighting freedom with all their cunning and cruelty because freedom is their greatest fear—and they should be afraid, because freedom is on the march." President George W. Bush, speech to Republican National Convention, Sept. 2, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas P.M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2004).

the degree that people around the world consent to it and consider this order to be legitimate and inevitable.”

There are, of course, many threats to this inevitability—namely, that so many dangerous actors around the world don’t consider it inevitable. While Friedman and others writing about globalization’s triumphs in the 1990s were accurate enough about its upside, they fell short in analyzing the virulence with which it would be resisted. Fukuyama writes with understatement that “the modernity of the liberal West is difficult to achieve for many societies around the world.” More than that, many societies simply don’t want it and have centered an effective guerilla war on resisting it. As Fareed Zakaria pointed out, “for Western intellectuals, modernization is seen as largely benign and, in any case, as inevitable. But in large parts of the world modernization is a grueling, alien process that threatens to denude cultures and disrupt settled ways of life.”<sup>4</sup>

Globalization is not inevitable, at least not in its pure, “American” form. There is much about U.S.-sponsored globalization for those who missed the boat—or chose not to take it—to dislike. Opponents see in democracy the apathy and cynicism of the governed, the outsized influence of small interest groups, and a process sullied by money. They see the ravages of capitalism’s ups and downs, the dislocation of traditional means of production, the corporate scandals, and the greed in the only economic system that has no inherent component of social justice. Despite this opposition, Mead believes there is no going back for the resisters, and writes that state-centered “Fordist economics are coming to an end because it is no longer the most efficient method to organize capitalist production.” But not everyone will see technology-driven free-wheeling “millennial capitalism” as progress.

One hundred years ago, the temptation would have been to simply let the resisters slide into premodern darkness. But the combination of disintegrating states, apocalyptic terrorists, and readily available means of destruction means that the United States cannot ignore those who are aggressively resisting the world order. Thus, the authors of these five books fundamentally agree on the strategic tenet that the best defense is a good offense. Fukuyama maintains that the United States must throw itself into nation-building to eliminate the threats arising from failed states, calling this “the central project of contemporary international politics.” Mead would continue “the American project” of “protect[ing] our own domestic security while building a peaceful world order of democratic states linked by common values and sharing a common prosperity.”

Former British diplomat Robert Cooper notes that “the belief that what is good for America is good for mankind has always been a guiding conviction in Washington.” But he wants it done in an EU-like, “postmodern” way—with

<sup>4</sup>Fareed Zakaria, “Return of History: What September 11 Hath Wrought,” in James F. Hoge, Jr. & Gideon Rose, eds., *How Did This Happen? Terrorism and the New War* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

the United States acting within a collaborative web of mutual dependency and transparency. “Since 9/11 the U.S. has acquired a steely determination that frightens even some of its friends,” he laments. While he agrees that the United States should be playing a major role in remaking the bad places of the world, at the end of the day this is better done through “some mixture of law, bargaining, and arbitration.”

While Cooper denies that there is a Hegelian progression to multi-lateral nirvana, he does seem to think that the answer for the world is at the end of a linear process. “Today we have a choice between nationalism and integration: balance or openness. Chaos is tamed by empire, empires are broken up by nationalism; nationalism gives way, we must hope to internationalism.” Ferguson, in contrast, seems to believe that the troublesome parts of the world are so hopeless that the United States should pass over Cooper’s postmodern world in favor of launching its own liberal imperialism. “[E]mpire is more necessary in the 21st century than ever before. . . . In many cases of economic ‘backwardness,’ a liberal empire can do better than a nation-state. . . . A country like—to take just one example—Liberia would benefit immeasurably from something like an American colonial administration.”

The ways the United States can go about this are numerous. *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer has observed that there are four schools of U.S. grand strategy: isolationists; liberal internationalists such as Cooper, who “want us to yield [our unique power] piece by piece, by subsuming ourselves in a new global architecture in which America becomes not the arbiter of international events, but a good and tame international citizen”; realists, who have “the clearest understanding of the new unipolarity and its uses—unilateral and preemptive if necessary”; and democratic globalists—today’s neoconservatives, perhaps, who seek “to vindicate the American idea by making the spread of democracy [and] the success of liberty, the ends and means of American foreign policy.”<sup>5</sup> But the failing of democratic globalism is that it tends to see the world in terms of America’s own experience and determination to fight for freedom and democracy—a hubris that is still weighing down the Iraq occupation. Fukuyama notes that combining the “shining city on a hill” rhetoric with a messianic strategy “leads at times to a typically American tendency to confuse its own national interests with the broader interests of the world as a whole.”

Krauthammer himself subscribes to democratic realism, a fusion of realism and democratic globalism. This combination of liberal ideals and American power politics has most notably shaped American policy in the Truman, Reagan, and George W. Bush administrations. It is bent on spreading the freedoms rooted in “the American idea,” but “tempered in its universalistic

<sup>5</sup> Speech at AEI Annual Dinner, February 10, 2004, Washington, D.C.

aspirations and rhetoric. . . . It must be targeted, focused and limited.” It is an imperial mission, no doubt, but how does this empire function?

### **The Empire Strikes. . . . Where?**

There are four major questions shaping the mechanics of this task, and on all these the authors disagree. First, to what degree should this be done by the United States? Second, what are the exact ends of this expedition into the untidy parts of the globe? Third, should imperial-like interventions aim at the areas harboring the biggest threat (Islamic regions with large militant elements) or areas suffering the biggest collapse of order (sub-Saharan Africa)? Fourth, what should be the *modus operandi* of the imperial intervener?

As noted above, Cooper believes the enterprise should be an international effort. While he concedes that the world is generally a better place for the United States’ overwhelming power and its judicious exercise of same, he also notes a historical truism of international relations: “The idea of a single country having unrestrained and unrestrainable power is not welcome.” The United States would append to this statement the caveat, “except for the benign power of the United States.” But no one outside of the United States believes this. An anti-American zeitgeist exists today that stems largely from the simple preponderance of American power, and it operates as a real constraint on policy. Moreover, as Mead emphasizes, this anti-Americanism is largely fed by American policies that are the right ones, but poorly marketed. Washington seems at times to be missing a major precept of international communication: it’s not what you are saying; it’s what they are hearing. “My way or the highway” provides strategic and moral clarity, but does not inspire followers.

Nonetheless, all the writers agree that the world would be much worse off if the United States did not continue to be the 800-pound gorilla on the international scene. Mead writes that destroying America’s power “would lead to far more misery and danger than we now see, and the fall of American power would be a catastrophe not only for Americans but for millions and billions who live beyond our frontiers.” Ferguson predicts a descent into anarchy if the United States does not proactively underwrite a world order; Fukuyama leaves the door open for some sort of “international community” leadership but does not go into detail.

As to what the ends themselves should be, there is some difference of opinion. Ambassador James Dobbins and his RAND colleagues take the current American position that democracy itself is the end. “Democratization is the core objective of nation-building operations.” They even suggest that democratization is in many ways superior to economic advancement or just general political stability. Discussing the Somalia, Haiti, and Afghanistan interventions (two of which failed and one of which is ongoing), they remark that while no “reconstruction” program could make these countries prosperous, the

interventions at least encouraged “democratic transitions. . . . Nation-building is not principally about economic reconstruction; rather, it is about political transformation.”

Ferguson and Fukuyama disagree with the overt focus on democracy that has characterized America’s intervention goals in the past. Reviving an important debate over development, Ferguson sides with those, like Samuel Huntington and Fareed Zakaria, who prefer that institution-building and economic advancement precede turning basket-case countries back over to their own voters. Ferguson quotes Paddy Ashdown, the former UN High Commissioner in Bosnia, that “it is much more important to establish the rule of law quickly than to establish democracy quickly. Because without the former, the latter is soon undermined.” Fukuyama would also concentrate on institution-building prior to setting up the ballot box. He sees an inherent contradiction in the United States’ intervening on an almost colonial basis and its focus on democracy. “[C]ontemporary norms do not accept the legitimacy of anything other than self-government, which makes us then insist that whatever governance we do provide be temporary and rule transitional. [W]e do not in fact know how to transfer institutional capacity in a hurry.”

For Fukuyama and Ferguson, democracy is certainly a goal, but only after failed states have been given (forcibly if need be) the institutions with which they can properly run their affairs. Rather than rushing to elections, as the United States tends to do, Fukuyama maintains that an intervention should focus first on good governance, while Ferguson believes that institution-building will lead to economic development. “The key to economic success lies in the adoption of legal, financial, and political institutions conducive to investment and innovation.”

This indirect debate is principally about development theory. But it also implicitly brings the democratic peace theory into play. There is reason to believe that a world full of democratic states might not be any safer. From Algeria to Kyrgyzstan, the United States implicitly and explicitly supports the authoritarian, non-democratic regimes of more than dozen Islamic states in the belief that the democratic forces within them would be more antithetical to U.S. interests than the current roster of monarchs and strongmen—that is, our allies. So should democratization necessarily be the focus of America’s intervention strategy? Perhaps a more durable end is to focus on influencing broadly representative and responsible governments rather than seeing a plebiscite as the alpha and omega of U.S. involvement.

Similarly, the “where” question needs to be solved before a grand strategy can take shape around interventionism. Should the strategy be applied to direct threats or the direst cases? The direct threats tend to be states that are not quite failing, that maintain enough government wherewithal to make themselves threatening by sponsoring terrorist activity, seeking WMD, or otherwise adopting postures and strategies threatening to U.S. interests. Mead says this was the premise that led to the Iraq war: “The neoconservatives saw the

occupation of Iraq as the first stage in the reconstruction of the entire region.” On the other hand, the most compelling cases from a humanitarian perspective may have little to no short-term strategic impact but have profound implications in the long run. Then there is the principle of practicality. Interventions may be undertaken simply because they are doable, and not because they best fit U.S. strategy. Finally, the government will be pressed to show some real economic return on this investment in blood and treasure. That might push interventions in another direction—Latin America, for instance.

As to the “how” question, Ferguson’s mechanism would be American-led neocolonialism in the best sense of the word—a sort of enlightened paternalism:

A liberal empire is the political counterpart to economic globalization. If economic openness—free trade, free labor movement and free capital flows—helps growth, and if capital is more likely to be formed where the rule of law exists and government is not corrupt, then it is important to establish not only how economic activity becomes globalized but also how—by what mechanism—economically benign institutions can be spread around the world.

A Ferguson-type intervention might—in the case of severely failed states—require an even more intrusive level of American involvement in indigenous affairs than has been seen in Iraq, or even Germany and Japan after World War II. If, as he suggests, the United States is to be the entity that underwrites globalization and maintains the underlying peace and order, then the United States would have, at the very least, to lead the international community in creating full-scale colonial-type institutions.

The RAND experts who studied the recent U.S. experiences in nation-building arrived at one overall conclusion: if you want an intervention characterized by nation-building to be sustainable, go big. Experienced nation-builder Ambassador Dobbins and his team state that the “most important determinant seems to be the level of effort—measured in time, manpower, and money.” They also conclude that while unilateral efforts can work, multilateral ones are ultimately better. Similarly, more troops are better than less—there is an “inverse correlation between the size of the stabilization force and the level of risk.” And if you’re in the democracy business, “five years seems to be the minimum required to enforce an enduring transition to democracy.” So, in the U.S. experience in nation-building, you get what you pay for—and, in general, more of everything is best.

Fukuyama agrees with the RAND experts in general, but pays more attention to what raw material the nation-builders are working with. While RAND concludes that the successes are distinguished from the failures by the level of outside effort, Fukuyama notes that key institution-building or tinkering can be enough to get a nation-building exercise on the right track:

The United States is sometimes credited with successful nation-building in postwar Germany and Japan, where it was an occupying power. In terms of the administrative

capacity that is the subject of this book, it is clear that nothing of the sort happened. . . . What the U.S. did successfully was to change the basis of legitimization in both cases from authoritarianism to democracy and to purge the members of the old regime that started the war.

Like Ferguson, Fukuyama seems to prefer a heavy touch when it comes to institution-building in failed states, in order to build strong institutions that reshape identity and affiliation.<sup>6</sup> He seems skeptical of soft power, of leading by example alone, or of laissez-faire imperialism, and writes that “markets seldom shape individuals’ sense of their own identity; organizations do.” But do these organizations and institutions need to be put in by force, or hard power? Is there no role for the old-fashioned use of influence? Fukuyama’s study of “conditionality” (hard economic or political incentives) shows a mixed record. In some cases nation-building simply cannot be done with a light touch. But does nation-building with a heavy touch suit the American government or polity?

### **What Stands Between Empire and the United States?**

While the authors generally agree that the United States should lead in some fashion in draining the swamp, they also agree that the United States is ill-prepared structurally and institutionally for any sort of concerted strategy of imperialism or neocolonialism. Fukuyama, a former State Department policy planner, notes that in Iraq the U.S. Department of Defense “lacked the institutional capability to organize such a complex operation.” RAND hints at the same, but it did not have the mandate in this work to talk about what might make the government more well-suited for nation-building (RAND is a federally funded research center). The RAND authors do note that while the Pentagon has enjoyed ongoing support for traditional military forces, there has been “no comparable increase in the capacity of U.S. armed forces or of U.S. civilian agencies to conduct postcombat stabilization and reconstruction operations.” Moreover, RAND notes that neither State nor Defense “regard nation-building among their core missions.”

As a result, the United States goes about that nation-building into which it is thrown with a series of improvisations and interagency task forces, never wanting to admit that it should train some part of its government for constabulary duties. While there is a substantial security component to nation-building, constabulary forces, in the main, should not be classic military ones. The main tasks of the civil reconstruction and institution-building that are required in nation-building argue for government and nongovernmental forces that serve internal security (i.e. police, not military), legal, educational,

<sup>6</sup>Exactly the process that Robert Cooper says we all most go through to reach the end of power politics and enter postmodernism.



infrastructure, and economic needs. Since World War II, these tasks have fallen under the U.S. military. Iraq has shown that the Department of Defense is ill-suited for this task.

Oddly, all of the authors agreed on the need for the United States to become more involved in these missions, and yet none specifically addressed how the government should be organized for it. While the United States has taken initial steps to reorganize a World War II government for the new tasks of homeland security, it has done nothing for its new strategy of remaking the world's bad places in the furtherance of its own security. The American government is hopelessly misorganized for nation-building. The chief American official in each region of the world is a four-star general whose job is to be the "combatant commander" for the Pentagon but who ends up the most influential and powerful representative for the *entire* American government in his region. These generals and admirals have received little training in wielding all the tools of governmental and nongovernmental forces in complex nation-building exercises. Thus a government predicated on civilian control of the military (and promoting the same to its democratizing protégés) turns to the military for command of these operations. The time has come to have civilian representatives in this chain of command.

Niall Ferguson remarks that "this, then, is not only an empire without settlers, but also an empire without administrators." To Ferguson, the fact that America does not purposefully train administrators to meet the central challenge of our time makes any changes to the U.S. government's organization chart irrelevant.

America's brightest and best aspire not to govern Mesopotamia but to manage MTV; not to rule the Hejaz but to run a hedge fund. Unlike their British counterparts of a century ago, who left the elite British universities with an overtly imperial ethos, the letters ambitious young Americans would like to see after their names are CEO, not CBE.

The example of setting up Baghdad's stock exchange springs to mind. With a country full of financial market experts, the United States ended up turning to a handful of inexperienced government staffers to take charge of the effort. There simply was, and is, no mechanism in the U.S. government today to take advantage of the wealth and experience in this country and put it to use in government-sponsored nation-building. As Ferguson notes, without something like the Indian Civil Service or British Colonial Office to attract elite leaders and command the resources of an empire in the furtherance of its nation-building goals, the U.S. is likely to continue to follow the pattern of initial military success followed by frustration and disillusionment.

Cooper, who proposes a postmodern, Kyotoaccord type internationalism, sees America lacking the political will to undertake serious nation-building. "[America is] a robustly modern state. It is in any case clear that neither the U.S. government nor Congress accepts the necessity or the desirability of interdependence, or its corollaries of openness, mutual surveil-

lance and mutual interference to the extent that most European governments now do.”

Mead chalks up the United States’ unwillingness to invest in neocolonial means to Americans’ traditional mistrust of big government and big government programs. He writes, using his now-familiar taxonomy of American political thought, that “many Jacksonians have more confidence that big government will collect big taxes than that it will pay out big benefits. . . . Americans tend to shun collective social action and solutions to economic problems in favor of individual action.” After all, why should the government many Americans don’t trust to run America be running more of the world? Even so, Mead notes that “as the debates rage, most Americans continue to support the idea that the United States should lead the effort to build a safer, prosperous, and democratic world. The problem comes, to paraphrase Mead, when the rhetorical basis of American strategy writes checks that the body politic does not want to cash.

Ultimately, Mead believes that the United States is capable of walking that elusive middle-ground where it aggressively and smartly intervenes where it must and leaves behind a sustainable entity that subscribes to the liberal world order over which the United States stands custodian. But that would take wise statesmen, brilliant strategists, responsive U.S. government institutions, a much better job of marketing American policy, and a world not so suspicious of America. Indeed, it is a variation on this last point that is under-appreciated by all these authors in their views of nation-building. Hated or loved, there is one thing the United States is not viewed as—a neutral party. Peacekeeping and nation-building often require significant outside forces that can effectively play the honest broker or neutral arbiter. The United States often thinks it can attain this status, but it cannot. Rather than fight this phenomenon of the sole superpower, the United States should avoid those military roles on the ground and seek to coopt other parties more suited for these roles.

Ferguson offers the most intriguing and controversial theory of why the United States must act the empire but is likely to fail at it all the same.

The decline and fall of America’s undeclared empire may be due not to terrorists at the gates or to the rogue regimes that sponsor them, but to a fiscal crisis of the welfare state at home. . . . Americans like security. But they like Social Security more than national security. It is their preoccupation with the hazards of old age and ill health that will prove to be the real cause of their country’s fiscal overstretch, not their preoccupation with the hazards of terrorism and the ‘axis of evil.’

Ferguson is particularly concerned about America’s status as the world’s largest debtor, a growing percentage of which debt (46 percent at last count) is in the hands of foreign investors. (Mead, not worried, maintains that this simply ties them more closely to our “system” and its success.) To Ferguson, when you combine this with America’s institutional shortcomings and short political attention span, you don’t have the strongest basis for an empire. “Consuming

on credit, reluctant to go to the front line, inclined to lose interest in protracted undertakings: if all this conjures up an image of America as a sedentary colossus—to put it bluntly, a kind of strategic couch potato—then the image may be worth pondering.”

Provocative stuff, but unfair and wrong. No country with soldiers continuously on duty in more than one hundred countries around the globe is a strategic couch potato. The United States, even when it is in denial about just how imperial its international activities are, is a continuously vigorous power. A better criticism would be to take the United States on for its peculiarly American characteristic of wanting decisive solutions and quick-exit strategies. Accommodating an American desire for decisiveness—part of the United States’ “self-limiting character”—into imperial undertakings will be a challenge indeed.

## Prescriptions

Ferguson and Mead tell us that the United States has, for most of its history, acted imperially while insisting it’s not an empire in the classic sense. This is a fair charge, but it is also true that, since World War II, America has been an empire of ideas rather than territorial gain or the direct rule of subject peoples. It is a different kind of empire—one that is the most pervasive in history and yet the one with the lightest direct touch measured by traditional metrics. Washington firmly believes that vigorously exporting key American ideals is the key to security at home. Nonetheless, even if one accepts the strategy of draining-the-swamp-to-build-condos—as almost all these authors explicitly do—how it is done is almost more important than the decision to do it at all. This is a tricky business for America. As Mead warns us, “the American system faces two dangers. If the U.S. accumulates or uses too little power, the American system may fall apart as others pick away at it. Accumulate too much power, or use it in too heavy-fisted a way, and the system may disintegrate as others combine against it.”

The key to this imperial challenge, even within the seemingly limitless policy confines of the rhetoric American leaders use to describe their strategy, is being discriminating about how, where, why, and when to use American power. This brings us back to Charles Krauthammer’s admonition for a policy that is “targeted, focused, and limited.”

As several of these authors note, there is nothing wrong with an imperial center’s accepting local variations on the basic theme of economic and political liberalism. Dragging many parts of the disintegrating world forcibly into modernity will be hard enough, but even harder if the metrics of their progress and success do not suit their own history, culture, geopolitics and religion. As Fukuyama notes, “the East Asian fast-developers with strong governance imported certain institutions but modified them substantially to

make them work in *their* societies.” Lee Kuan Yew may have endured a few decades of scorn from the human rights community for not having an American-style democracy overnight, but in the meantime he built Singapore into an economic powerhouse that now is liberalizing politically at a sustainable pace along with a middle-class society that did not exist a generation ago.

One need not be a relativist to respect the cultural and historical parameters that will shape local variations of the imperial theme. But we must still ensure that the things most important to the empire and its security are safeguarded. Rather than an explicit message that U.S.-style democracy is the goal, we should have a minimum-bar-to-clear strategy. In the case of Iraq, these requirements might be that the government (1) is representative and serves with the consent of the governed; (2) can provide for basic order and security—both externally and internally; (3) protects minority rights; (4) guarantees a certain universal standard of human rights; (5) takes no steps to collude with terrorists, WMD producers/sellers, or other parties with nefarious designs on the United States or her allies; (6) provides a basic level of infrastructure, services, institutions, and laws associated with an economic order that will allow the country to progress in a market economy; and (7) bases its economic standing on the free and open global trading and energy systems, making no unilateral attempts to leave or manipulate those systems. (Fukuyama has similar thoughts related to public administration.) The imperial center should care deeply about these conditions and guarantee them even with force. By contrast, it shouldn’t care who the mayor of Fallujah is or if he was elected in a plebiscite within two years of U.S. intervention.

The imperial center must also recognize the limits of its power. Unfortunately, given sound-bite politics, this notion is not likely to be headlining major policy speeches any time soon. A flap ensued when President Bush suggested that the war on terrorism could not be “won” by traditional measurements.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, policymakers serving the most powerful and influential nation in history must appreciate, as Ferguson does, that “it is perfectly possible to have a great deal of all these things [wealth, weaponry, and soft power], yet to have only limited power. Indeed, that is precisely the American predicament.” A better appreciation of the limits to America’s imperial power would help the United States to develop more effective mechanisms for doing the empire’s work.

Finally, the United States must lead in developing new methodologies and expertise for this business. More important, it must lead in a way that inspires influential followers. As Mead notes, “the United States has spent more time and energy resenting the inadequacies of the current international architecture than in leading the way to its renewal.” This is 1943–47 all over again. A whole series of new Bretton Woods are needed—for politics, security, economics, and technology. No international institution created to help address these issues

<sup>7</sup> President Bush interview with Matt Lauer, NBC’s Today Show, Aug. 31, 2004.

or others stands a chance if it is not led in development by a United States that is determined in advancing its own interests, but inclusive in its approach to appreciating others. As Mead reminds, “at the end of the day, the 5 percent minus of the world’s population who live in the U.S. cannot impose a world order on the 95 percent plus of humanity beyond our frontiers. The U.S. must stand for values and freedoms that make sense not only to ourselves but to our partners and friends around the world.”

