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Embracing Empire:  
The Future of Global Power and Democracy

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## **Embracing Empire: The Future of Global Power and Democracy**

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In modern history, the term, “empire” denotes a “state which rules over colonized territory.” After the end of the Second World War, the connotations of empire became extremely negative as decolonization swept the globe. During the short span of just a few years at the beginning of the twenty-first century, people inside and outside of the United States are again beginning to frequently deploy the term, this time to describe America as either an “empire” or as a “global empire.” The direct reason for the resurrection of this word is that for many people associate the military attacks and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq directed by the Bush administration with the earlier imperialism of the great powers. I believe we need to think more deeply about this issue.

First, I think that semantically it is incorrect to attach the label of empire for the entire span of American history and that such a characterization is undermined by historical facts. The original thirteen American states were themselves once colonies, so a fundamental part of US history was its struggle for independence from empire. The United States did colonize Cuba and the Philippines, but it was a late-developing imperial power. Since the end of the Second World War, an underlying premise of US policy has been anti-colonialism. If we consider this history, it is clear that the current use of the term empire signifies something different than from the previous use of the word that designated colonial empires, or countries that sought to expand their territory, which was the predominant form of imperialism until the twentieth century.

### *The Coercive Nature of Imperial Power*

So why is empire now being frequently employed? Perhaps this is because America recognizes that it acts as the “global police” and this role is one of the reasons that people describe the United States as an empire. This role is based on the strength of its coercive power—the might of its military power that vastly exceeds any other country. At the same time, America has positioned itself as the “global judge.” The world, however, regards the United States as an “unworthy judge,” an “empire with power but without authority or legitimacy.”

In order to examine the coercive power of empire, we need to consider to what degree the United States is fulfilling the role of global police.

First, as has already been pointed out in the presentations, the United States is the sole surviving superpower in the post-Cold War era. It not only possesses the greatest military resources, but those resources are equivalent to those of all the countries that rank from second to ninth. In terms of quality, the US military has applied information revolution to military technology and produced a “revolution in military technology.” As a result, the US military has the ability to attack with great precision and efficiency, with relatively few soldiers and few (partisan) casualties, and to destroy enemy forces in a short period of time. The disparity in military power is so great that, for example, if the America goes to war in concert with Britain, the country with the next most technologically-sophisticated military, the British army simply becomes a drag on the US military. It is unlikely that this gap in military power will be closed any time soon.

Second, we need to think about strategy. As Professor Gerstle has just described, the Bush Doctrine justifies preemptive attacks by the United States. This is a huge departure from previous American strategy. During the Cold War, the guiding principles of US strategy were “containment” and “determent,” which were dedicated to preventing an enemy attack with the threat of massive retaliation. In some situations, however, the Bush doctrine goes much further with the potential that America might strike out an enemy before being attacked.

The third issue is who is the target of these attacks. The Bush administration has adopted language with strong religious connotations, such as the “axis of evil,” to describe the “enemy.” As a result, such countries as Iraq, North Korea, and Iran are faced with the alternative of either destroying any weapons of mass destruction that they might possess or having their regimes be crushed by an American military attack. Of course, there is a certain amount of ambiguity about who is being singled out as evil. The uncertainty of just who the enemy is produces widespread resentment, but it is also what makes the threat so effective. For example, soon after the United States attacked Iraq, Libya announced that it would dismantle its weapons of mass destruction. Because of this ambiguity, the United States can self-righteously determine what country it wants to attack.

The fourth issue we must consider is the leaps in logic in the strategy of the Bush administration. First, there is a contradiction between waging war against countries on a national level to combat terrorism that is conducted by individuals or groups rather than nations. Second, there is a problematic connection between the “war on terrorism” and the “elimination of weapons of mass destruction.” Third, the administration is ignoring international law when it militarily crushes certain regimes in the name of “eliminating weapons of mass destruction.”

So what is the ideological foundation supporting this military strategy? In the case of the Bush administration, this ideology is characterized by the presumption that United States wields force only for “just means.” The words “we” and “they” appear frequently in the speeches of President Bush. In general, Bush divides the world in two extreme poles, so that the use of “we” is linked to “justice” while “they” is connected to “evil.” His choice of words reveals the attitude that America’s “application of military power actual is always just” and “the enemy is a bad influence that seeks to spread evil.”

It appears that the administration thinks that “we,” in other words, America’s mighty military power, cannot possibly be unjust. Likewise, there is little sense of caution that America might do things that are wrong. The Bush administration frequently labels other countries “rogue states” and naively thinks that America itself can never act like a rogue state.

Based on the ideology that “we are just, and they are evil” and on the pretext of weapons of mass destruction, the United States toppled the Hussein regime in Iraq, but there were no weapons of mass destruction to be found. This was distressing for the Bush administration, but it is clear what nations possess weapons of mass destruction. These are, of course, countries such the United States, Britain, and Russia, but these nations all optimistically believe that their weapons would never be used for evil purposes. But, in the United States those weapons are already being employed for evil.

Many people probably don't recognize the connection, but this use of weapons of mass destruction for evil was the anthrax scare of 2001, which resulted in the deaths of five Americans. An examination of the anthrax that was used has definitively confirmed that it had been smuggled out of some US domestic military installation. In other words, weapons of mass destruction have already been deployed domestically but because many people believe that Americans would never use their weapons for evil, this incident has not become a serious problem in the United States.

To summarize, the military power of the United States far exceeds that of any other country, the Bush administration now justifies preemptive attacks, its identification of possible threats is ambiguous, and its strategy is characterized by logical inconsistencies. The administration also optimistically believes that America's military power is applied justly. These, I think, are the characteristics of the "American empire."

### *"Why Do They Hate Us?"*

Next, I would like to talk about an important question that Bush used in his speech to a joint session of congress soon after the 9/11 attacks. As I just mentioned, Bush frequently used the words "us" and "them" in this speech, but the sentence I would like to concentrate in particular is his query, "Why do they hate us?" This is an extremely important phrase, I think.

To answer this question, in his speech President Bush asserted that some people hate America because of democracy. His answer was entirely off the mark. Yes, the United States is indeed hated, but that is certainly not because of democracy. Rather, what they hate is the nature of America's coercive power.

To put it metaphorically, Bush presumes that he is a just sheriff, who is both the policeman and the judge. This sheriff does not only go after people who have broken the law, but if he suspects someone is an enemy, he goes after them even if he does not have any solid evidence that they have committed a crime. At the same time, he is not agitated when his country's biological weapons are used to kill his fellow citizens. For many people in the world, including the 9/11 kidnappers, such attitudes appear to be impartial and self-righteous. As a result, America's actions find, and create, new enemies one after another. And all the while, the Bush administration thinks its actions are just, but America becomes to be regarded as a crooked sheriff by certain people in the world, and the United States identifies and then goes after new enemies that America itself is creating.

I think this vicious cycle is the answer to the question, "Why do they hate us?"

Incidentally, Bush's tendency to simply divide the world into either enemies or allies and to declare that we are just and they are evil is just like the statements made by Osama bin Ladin. In this way, these two rivals' way of thinking has much in common.

*The Collapse of Political Authority*

Next, I would like to talk about the political authority of the American empire, and focus on the issue of unilateralism.

Those who pursue unilateralism dislike the method of coming to an agreement through bilateral or multilateral negotiations and prefer for their country to act on its own. A preference for unilateralism by the Bush administration was already evident even during its first six months in office. For example, the administration defected from the Kyoto Agreement to reduce global warming, it allowed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty to expire, it scrapped the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty that it saw as an impediment to the development of a missile defense system, it emasculated plans for a UN conference on small weapons reduction, and it rejected the conclusions of an inspection regime for the Biological Weapons Ban Treaty. And these are just a few of many possible examples.

Three characteristics sum up American unilateralism. First, the United States depends on its own power rather than on cooperation with other countries. Recently Russia has shown an interest in cooperating with other countries to accomplish its aims, but the United States has shown little desire to work with others, as shown by a reliance on its own missile defense system. Second, as just mentioned, the United States claims that only it is not bound by decisions that have been agreed to multilaterally. Third, many people in the United States self-righteously believe that its principles are universally applicable to the entire world. To anyone, the actions of the United States appear to be unilateral.

Such unilateralism is not only limited to the actions of the Bush administration, but to an extent is a traditional characteristic of US foreign policy. This is signified by an expression often used to historically describe American policy, a “swinging pendulum between interventionism and isolationism.” I will forgo talking in greater detail due to time constraints.

Next, I would like to consider the questions of whether such policies lend authority to the American government and whether or not they give it more power to lead the entire world.

By “authority,” I am referring to the ability of a country to gain the trust of other countries and people, to persuade them to follow its leadership, and not to raise objections to its policies. As Professor Endo has pointed out, the source of this authority is “soft power.”

In the case of the Bush administration, even when other countries follow its lead, they seem to submit unwillingly, and the leverage of American soft power appears to be weakening. I would like to emphasize the contradiction between the extreme military power of the United States and its increasing inability to politically persuade and bring others into an agreement with its policies.

There are two principal reasons for this situation. First, too often the United States systematically proceeds to order around other countries. In other words, too frequently the United States tries to persuade or force onto others the supposed universality of its

way of doing things, which are a reflection of its own culture. If the United States had the trust of other countries, it could criticize the United Nations and the Kyoto Agreement and persuade other countries to follow its leadership, but this is not the case, and it highlights the reduction in American soft power.

### *The Hegemony of a Great Power*

The second reason for the weakening of American soft power is related to Professor Dore's comments about the educational system. I don't have enough time to talk about this issue in depth, but I would like to make one point. As Professor Gerstle has observed, until 1973 the United States was a model and leader of the world. In relation to this, I would like to introduce the view of E. H. Carr, who discussed the responsibilities of major powers in a 1945 essay. Three previous presenters have referred to Churchill but I would like to refer to his intellectual rival, Carr.

At the end of the Second World War, Carr believed that the model nations for the future world were the United States and Britain, but this was not because these two countries were militarily powerful. Rather, this was, as Professor Gerstle just pointed out, because these were the principal countries where democracy survived during the Second World War. In addition, Carr regarded these two countries of having successfully integrated the various racial, cultural and religious members on the basis of universalism. This made these two countries a much better model for the world than Germany and Japan, which had invented cults venerating a single nation. Moreover, Carr believed that if governments ruled through persuasion and consensus, there was a greater chance that they would act in the same way in their relations with the outside world. In particular, Carr thought that America, which governed its citizens in this way, would guide the world through persuasion and consensus. Governance that avoided tyranny and force would endow the United States with the soft power it needed to lead the world.

Today's world, though, is entirely different from the one that Carr described. First, because the total number of democratic countries in the world has increased, the relative difference between the United States and Britain and the rest of the world has decreased. And after 9/11, although the United States is still a multi-ethnic country, its degree of religious tolerance has dropped dramatically. Furthermore, because the Bush administration has chosen to favor war as a strategy of foreign relations, the United States has become a symbol of tyranny and its hegemony has been weakened.

There is one additional point that I must make. At the beginning of the twentieth century, if any nation is going to be hegemonic and guide the world, it is imperative for it to deal directly with all global problems, such as environmental issues, to provide the competence, resources, and methods to successfully respond to these problems, and be recognized by the world as a great leader. But, as shown by its rejection of the Kyoto Agreement, the United States chose outright unilateralism instead of tackling this global environmental problem.

The actions of the United States, forcing its policies upon the world when the entire globe is questioning their legitimacy demonstrates that currently the United States deserves to be labeled an American empire. I would like to talk in more detail about this issue, but because of a lack of time, I leave it here.

### *Toward the Realization of Global Democracy*

In conclusion, I would like to make a few remarks about democracy.

Professor Tanaka has pointed the difference between domestic democracy and democracy among nations, and Professor Gerstle has mentioned the importance of social movements. In relation to this, in order to solve global problems, I don't think it is adequate to simply extend the existing national systems of representative government and administration to cover the entire world.

There are three conditions necessary for global democracy. Two hundred years ago, the philosopher James Mill, who made important contributions to the establishment of modern democracy, suggested that the most important discovery of the modern age was not the steam engine but was representative democracy. People modified the systems of the early modern era, and created political parties, elections, and assemblies, and skillfully extended and applied municipal governing systems to cover entire countries. In order to replicate this and create global democracy in the future, people will need to demonstrate tremendous skill in crafting new systems of governance. These skills are the first condition.

Second, people need to hold strong convictions that will sustain movements to deal with the world's various problems. In order for social movements to be successful, people need to feel that they themselves are the actors in creating future communities and that they have the authority to determine what global policies are enacted. As has been already indicated, a third condition for global democracy is a revival of political democracy on a national level, which continues to be weakened. When these three conditions are combined, progress will be made in establishing global democracy.

Finally, I would like to recall the thinking of E. H. Carr that is related to the issue of empire. The key to accomplishing this prescriptive vision is for great countries to construct policies of enlightened self-interest and to think of the needs of others, especially to consider the needs of the weak, during debates about legitimacy. If this happens, and is combined with skill in crafting new systems and revived democracy on a national level, there is hope of creating global democracy.

Thank you.