

## WHITHER AMERICA?

By

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As this column has reiterated repeatedly, the world now lives in an American Imperium. Its domestic politics are of more than just passing interest for the rest of the world. With a Presidential election year looming, what do the tea leaves augur for the Imperial metropole? With the US seemingly bogged down in Iraq, a burgeoning fiscal deficit, and a pale but jobless economic recovery from the recent recession, it would seem that President Bush who looked invincible just a few months ago appears to be in trouble. But is he?

My guess would be that by the time of the election the massive fiscal and monetary stimulus applied during the last few years, and still continuing, will lead to a rise in output and employment. Bush is unlikely to be defeated for the economic reasons which sank his father. It is the financial and human costs of the reconstruction of Iraq which are the unpredictable element. Clearly the leading Democratic contender Howard Dean seems to think so. He is running unashamedly as the anti-war candidate. So what is likely to be the size of the 'peace party' he is courting?

Kevin Bowman and James Wilson of the American Enterprise Institute in Washington provide the answer ("Defining the Peace Party", [www.aei.org](http://www.aei.org)). They find that about 15 -20% of the US electorate has resolutely opposed the war, both before it began and after. This is the same level of opposition at the start of the Korean war in 1950, and Vietnam in 1965. But, unlike the swift war in Iraq, these prolonged wars led to growing opposition: to over 40% in 1951 during the Korean and 45% in 1967 to the Vietnam war. Those opposed to the Iraq war were indifferent to the role of the United Nations, and the issue of weapons of mass destruction- which seems to have embroiled Tony Blair in the U.K. The peace party cannot be explained in terms of age, income or education - except that large numbers with post graduate degrees opposed the war. The main difference between doves and hawks were based on political party, ideology and race. Democrats were twice as likely to oppose the war than Republicans. Blacks were opposed to the war than whites by similar margins. Ideological differences seem to matter much more. There is a large group of hawks who are in favour of a muscular military response, and a much smaller number of doves who oppose war under any circumstances. Why?

An important book Walter Russell Mead (*Special Providence*) provides the answer. He identifies four different schools of foreign policy with support in the US., named after various US presidents embodying the respective ideologies. The first are the Wilsonians. They believe in universal moralism: in the essential harmony of interests among individuals in the world, with those seeking to break international norms being brought to heel through international sanctions. They believe in free trade. This is the party of the League of Nations and the United Nations. Its main support lies with the elites of the two coasts in the US. The second are the Hamiltonians, who are the party of merchants and industrialists. Though supporting free trade they believe it should be based on the principle of reciprocity. They are in favour of tariffs to protect infant industries. Since their disastrous support for the Smoot-Hawley tariff in the inter-war years, they have since the Second World War combined with the Wilsonians to rebuild

another liberal international economic order.

The third group are Jeffersonians, who consider the most vital interest to be the preservation of American democracy in a dangerous world. They seek to defend American independence by the least costly and dangerous method, while opposing attempts to impose American values on others. They are suspicious of both big business and big government, seeing both as threats to liberty. They are libertarians. They are against foreign wars and entanglements as these extend the powers of the state. They do not want the American republic to be transformed into an intercontinental empire, for as John Quincy Adams- one of their icons- stated: "She might become the dictatress of the world: she would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit". They are the isolationist party.

The fourth and largest group are Jacksonians. They have been the most influential party, as they comprise middle America. Like the Jeffersonians, they are highly suspicious of elites. They too are civil libertarians and deeply committed to the Constitution and the preservation of the liberties of ordinary Americans. But there are also deep differences. These became apparent during the Cold War, with the Jeffersonians being the most dovish, the Jacksonians the most hawkish. They express the social, cultural and religious values of a large portion of the American public, but not the elites. Theirs is the political philosophy of the American heartland than the two coasts. "The Jacksonian school represents a deeply embedded, widely spread populist and popular culture of honour, independence and courage , and military pride among the American people". They are America's warriors.,

The Jacksonians are the descendants of the Scotch-Irish who settled in the Carolinas, the Old West, the South and South central states. But Jacksonian populism has moved beyond these ethnic and geographical limits. Over time most urban immigrant groups have assimilated to this quintessentially American culture: emphasising rugged individualism, honour and respect for ordinary people, economic success based on hard work, absolute equality of dignity and right, a constant search for self-improvement. This democratic and populist culture provides "the spectacle of a country that is good for average people to live in, a place where ordinary people can and do express themselves culturally, economically, and spiritually without any inhibition". It is what attracts so many ordinary people to the United States from around the world, while it is also the reason why so many sensitive souls particularly from the elitist educated classes in Europe and their outposts on the East and West coasts of the US find this culture crass and vulgar.

In foreign policy the Jacksonians are realists who have no truck with Wilsonian moralism. The world community Wilsonians seek is for them a moral impossibility, even a moral monstrosity. They believe that international life will remain violent and anarchic. They have little regard for international law and practice. They accept the need at times to fight pre-emptive wars, and assassinate foreign leaders with bad intentions. They separate issues of war and morality. They believe if a war is worth fighting it must be fought completely. It should be fought to achieve strategic and tactical objectives with as few US casualties as possible. There is nothing wrong in civilian targeting in war if it will bring the enemy's capitulation. Finally, wars must end in victory, but foes who have surrendered unconditionally should be treated magnanimously. It is the mass patriotism and the martial spirit of the Jacksonians which has made the American Imperium possible. Given its political weight in a mass democracy, the other schools competing to run US foreign policy ignore it at their peril. President Bush, despite his

patrician upbringing- and unlike his father- has reinvented himself in the wilds of Texas as a Jacksonian. Hence the visceral hatred he arouses in the cultivated elites of the two coasts of the US, Europe, and of course India. If, however, Howard Dean gets the Democratic nomination, as seems likely at the moment, the mass of Jacksonians will see him off like the earlier peace candidate, George McGovern, as being no better than the despicable 'surrender monkeys' of 'old' Europe.