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In Defense of Empires



The world needs a Pax Americana; an essential first step is for the United States to face up to its imperial obligations.

THE MAJOR ARGUMENT in favor of empires is that they provide the most basic of public goods—order—in an anarchical international society of states. This is akin to maintaining order in social life. The three basic values of all social life, which any international order should seek to protect, were cogently summarized by the late Hedley Bull as: first, to secure life against violence which leads to death or bodily harm; second, that promises once made are kept; third, that “the possession of things will remain stable to some degree and will not be subject to challenges that are constant and without limit.”

Empires—which for our purposes can be simply defined as “multiethnic conglomerates held together by transnational organizational and cultural ties”—have historically both maintained

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peace and promoted prosperity for a simple reason.¹ The centers of the ancient civilizations in Eurasia—where sedentary agriculture could be practiced and yielded a surplus to feed the towns—were bordered in the north and south by areas of nomadic pastoralism: the steppes of the north and the semi-desert of the Arabian peninsula to the south. In these regions the inhabitants had kept up many of the warlike traditions of our hunter-gatherer ancestors, and were prone to prey upon the inhabitants of the sedentary “plains” and at times attempted to convert them into their chattel, like cattle. This meant that the provision of one of the classical public goods—protection of its citizens from invaders—required the extension of territory to some natural barriers that could keep the barbarians at bay. The Roman, Chinese, and various Indian empires were partly created to provide this pax, which was essential to keep their labor intensive and sedentary forms of making a living intact. The pax of various imperiums has thus been essential in providing one of the basic public goods required for prosperity.

These empires can further be distinguished as being either multi-cultural or homogenizing. The former included the Abbasids, the various Indian empires, the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and the British, where little attempt was made to change “the habits of the heart” of the constituent groups—or if it was, as in the early British Raj, an ensuing backlash led to a reversal of this policy.

The homogenizing empires, by contrast, sought to create a “national” identity out of the multifarious groups in their territory. The best example of these is China, where the ethnic mix was unified as Hans through the bureaucratic device of writing their names in Chinese characters in a Chinese form, and suppressing any subsequent discontent through the subtle repression of a bureaucratic authoritarian state. In our own time the American “melting pot,” creating Americans out of a multitude of ethnicities

¹P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1699–2000* (Harlow, 2002), p. 664.

by adherence to a shared civic culture and a common language, has created a similar homogenized imperial state. Similarly, the supposedly ancient “nations” of Britain and France were created through a state-led homogenizing process. India, by contrast, is another imperial state whose political unity is a legacy of the British Raj but whose multiethnic character is underwritten by an ancient hierarchical structure which accommodates these different groups as different castes.

The imperial pax or order has also historically been associated with globalization—which is not a new phenomenon—and the prosperity it breeds. This is for two important reasons. First, in the language of institutional economics, transaction costs were reduced by these transnational organizations through their extension of metropolitan property rights to other countries. Second, by integrating previously loosely linked or even autarkic countries and regions—through free flows of goods, capital, and people—into a common economic space, they promote those gains from trade and specialization emphasized by Adam Smith. Thus the Graeco-Roman empires linked the areas around the Mediterranean, the Abbasid empire of the Arabs linked the worlds of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, the Mongol empire linked China with the Near East. Similarly, the various Indian empires created a common economic space in the sub-continent, while the expanding Chinese empire linked the economic spaces of the Yellow River with those of the Yangtze. It was the British who for the first time knit the whole world through their empire.

But most of these empires have ultimately declined. Given the existing technology and the inevitable predatoriness of the state, most of them overextended themselves.

In our own times, the death of nineteenth-century liberal economic order (LIEO) built by Pax Britannica fell on the fields of Flanders and led to a near century of economic disintegration and disorder. Only in the last decade, with the undisputed emergence of the United States as the world hegemon, has this been repaired. But is the U.S. willing and able to maintain its pax, which will underwrite the resurrection of another LIEO like the British in the

nineteenth century? And if it is not willing, what are likely to be the consequences?

I

Although Adam Smith did not have much to say about empire per se, his followers Cobden and Bright maintained correctly—following in the master's footsteps—that the arguments used by the imperial lobby that empire was in the economic interests of the general British populace were flawed. Even today economic historians are unable to agree on whether or not the benefits of retaining and expanding the formal British empire after 1850 exceeded its costs. These nineteenth-century classical liberals rightly maintained that, as foreign trade and investment were mutually advantageous (a non-zero-sum game), no empire was needed to obtain these gains from trade. All that was required was free trade and laissez-faire.

Also (and unlike their American cousins) they believed that despite other countries' protectionism, unilateral free trade was in the national interest. They did not want an empire to force other countries to free their foreign trade and investment. They rightly urged and succeeded in Britain's unilateral adoption of free trade with the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. By contrast, the current hegemon—the U.S.—has never accepted the case for unilateral free trade and has insisted on reciprocity, based on the erroneous doctrine that foreign trade is a zero-sum game. This, as we shall see, has poisoned the wells of the nascent new imperium.

But these classical liberals went further, believing that the interdependence resulting from a world knit by mutually advantageous trade and investment would also lead to universal peace. They were projecting the spontaneous order of a market economy, in which seemingly conflicting interests are unintentionally harmonized, onto the international arena. This was of course the view of the Enlightenment as codified in Kant's Perpetual Peace. The apotheosis of this English Liberalism was the pacifist book written by Sir Norman Angell in 1910 called *The Great Illusion*. Angell ar-

gues that war is economically irrational. It imposes excessive fiscal burdens, defeated powers seldom pay indemnities, colonies do not provide a profit, and "trade cannot be destroyed or captured by a military power." What, then, "is the real guarantee of the good behavior of one state to another? It is the elaborate interdependence which, not only in the economic sense, but in every sense, makes an unwarrantable aggression of one state upon another react upon the interests of the aggressor."²

But the liberals did not altogether eschew empire. For as Angell states: "Where the condition of a territory is such that the social and economic cooperation of other countries with it is impossible, we may expect the intervention of military force, not as the result of the 'annexationist illusion,' but as the outcome of real social forces pushing to the maintenance of order."³ That is the story of England in Egypt, or, for that matter, in India. This is the argument for a "white man's burden," indicating that even liberals were in favor of an empire to maintain a pax.

It was Woodrow Wilson who questioned this "policing" justification for empire. He was a utopian whose worldview combined classical liberalism, Burkean conservatism, Presbyterianism, and socialism. We know that Wilson referred to himself as an imperialist on two occasions, but this was to be a form of economic imperialism. But "for every sentence he uttered on commerce, he spoke two on the moral responsibility of the United States to sustain its historic idealism and render the service of its democracy." During his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1912, he said: "I believe that God planted in us visions of liberty . . . that we are chosen and prominently chosen to show the way to the nations of the world how they shall walk in the paths of liberty." The instrument for achieving this utopia was to be the League of Nations, maintaining collective security with transgressors being brought into line through sanctions. The traditional notion of "national interest" that had governed the European balance-of-

²Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion* (New York, 1911), p. 302.

³Angell, *The Great Illusion*, p. 139.

power system was eschewed, to be replaced by a community of nation-states in which the weak and the strong would have equal rights. In his new world order, said Wilson, the only questions would be: "Is it right? Is it just? Is it in the interest of mankind?"

This Wilsonian universal moralism was resurrected after the Second World War with the United Nations. Once again the anthropomorphic identification of states as persons, and the presumption of an essential harmony of interests between these equal world "citizens," was proclaimed, with those breaking international norms being brought into line through collective economic sanctions. These have been ineffective and inefficient in serving their foreign policy goals. By contrast, the nineteenth-century British pax was not maintained through economic sanctions to change states' behavior. Direct or indirect imperialism was used instead. The contrasting lessons from the last two centuries are clear and are of obvious relevance in the current confrontation with the countries in the "Axis of Evil" and the global "war on terror."

II

It was this global network of law protecting foreign capital that allowed the worldwide expansion of the "gentlemanly capitalism" of the City of London which was the hallmark and the real motive force behind the British empire. This legal framework was an integral element of Pax Britannica. Together with the economic integration through free trade and an international payments system based in the City of London, it allowed the empire to fulfill a "wider mission which can be summarized as the world's first comprehensive development program." After 1815, Britain aimed to put in place a set of like-minded allies who would cooperate in keeping the world safe from what Canning called the "youthful and stirring nations," such as the United States, which proclaimed the virtues of republican democracy, and from a "league of worn-out governments" in Europe whose future lay too obviously in the past. Britain offered an alternative vision of a liberal international order bound together by mutual interest in commercial progress

and underpinned by a respect for property, credit, and responsible government, preferably of the kind found at home. And compared with the previous millennia, the results were stupendous. It was at the height of this nineteenth-century LIEO from 1850–1914 that many parts of the third world for the first time experienced intensive growth for a sustained period.

The First World War marked the beginning of the end of this nineteenth-century LIEO. Worse, the turmoil of the interwar period also unraveled that complex web of international law and practice the British had woven to protect foreign capital. From the start of the First World War till 1929 (when international capital markets effectively closed down) the United States was the largest lender, with U.S. foreign investments increasing sixfold in the period. But the weakening of British hegemony meant that the enforcement of the international rules created in the nineteenth century became problematic.

After the Second World War, the United States, chastened by the global disorder its interwar isolationism had caused, sought a partial restoration of these nineteenth-century international rules. But that effort did not extend to the newly decolonized third world, which experienced an explosion of economic nationalism. The "embedded liberalism"—which is just another label for democratic socialism—promoted by both Wilson and then Roosevelt within the U.S., also meant that the sanctity of property rights that classical liberals had always sought to further no longer had much resonance in the United States (or, for that matter, the United Kingdom). Given the anti-imperialist moralism which became part of U.S. foreign policy after Wilson, attempts like the ill-fated Suez adventure of the British and the French in 1956 to prevent Nasser's nationalization of the Suez canal were scuttled by the U.S. There was no way in which anyone could thereafter stand against the new nation-states to assert their rights of national sovereignty against any purported international property rights. There was no bulwark against this disintegration of the international legal order. Most developing countries (and many European ones too) being both nationalist and dirigiste, sought to regulat

tax, or nationalize particular foreign investments on the grounds of national social utility rather than any particular antagonism to private property. This made it difficult for the U.S. to identify expropriation of foreign capital with a socialist ideology, as the nationalization of foreign oil companies in the 1960s and early 1970s by right-wing governments in the Middle East proved. This has cast a long shadow on the present.

But the U.S. did try after the Second World War, at Bretton Woods, to resurrect the three pillars on which the nineteenth-century LIEO had been built—free trade, the gold standard, and free capital mobility. But whereas the British Empire had fostered these by example, treaties, and direct and indirect imperialism, the U.S. instead created transnational institutions—the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade followed by the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.

Rather than following the correct British policy of adopting unilateral free trade and then allowing its hegemony to spread the norm, the U.S. chose the extremely acrimonious route of multilateral and, more recently, bilateral negotiations to reduce trade barriers.

This principle of reciprocity has long been the central tenet of U.S. trade policy, and the twentieth-century hegemon has sought to achieve free trade through reciprocal concessions in GATT and the WTO. But as the antiglobalization riots from Seattle onwards demonstrate, by perpetuating the myth that trade is a zero-sum game and that removing tariffs can only be done on the basis of reciprocity, issues of domestic policy will inevitably spill over into trade policy.

The attempt to resurrect something similar to the gold standard based on a quasi-fixed exchange rate system policed by the IMF also foundered on its basic premise that while freeing trade and maintaining convertibility on the current account, the capital account could be controlled and managed by distinguishing between long-term (good) and short-term (bad) capital flows. With the freeing of trade, such capital controls were shown to be inef-

fective as capital could be moved through the process of “leads and lags” in the current account. With the gradual and long drawn move to floating exchange rates, the need for the policeman of the Bretton Woods system—the IMF—also disappeared.

The World Bank was the instrument chosen to resurrect the international capital market which had been closed in particular to developing countries, with their defaults in the 1930s and the passage of the “Blue Sky” laws by the U.S. which forbade U.S. financial intermediaries from holding foreign government bonds. But the financial intermediation role of the Bank was soon overtaken by its role as a multilateral foreign aid agency, in part to play its part in the cold war, both by tying the “nonaligned” to the free world, and by promoting economic development. This was to be the instrument to be used to create another international development program, analogous to what the British had promoted in the nineteenth century through the propagation and enforcement of rules concerning international property rights, and through direct and indirect imperialism. As these routes were eschewed for the reasons already discussed, the only instrument available was the use of “conditionality,” tied to these flows to promote the appropriate development policies in the third world, by changing state behavior. But as with sanctions to serve foreign policy goals, this ever more stringent “conditionality” has been unsuccessful. So the current development “mantra” is that “good governance is all.” But now the stark choice which faces the successors of Wilsonian idealism in foreign policy also faces them in international economic policy: Can the order required for prosperity be promoted except through direct or indirect imperialism?

III

The third purpose empires served was to put a lid on ethnic conflicts. President Wilson’s invoking of the principle of national self-determination, as he proclaimed the new moral Age of Nations to replace the immoral old Age of Empires, let the ethnic genie out of the bottle.

From the viewpoint of global order, the most common form of deadly conflict today is a civil war in the name of cultural self-determination. Recent research on the causes of civil wars finds that the relationship of ethno-linguistic fragmentation in a state and the risk of a civil war is an inverted U in shape. The most homogenous as well as the most fragmented are least at risk of civil war. Thus there is likely to be a bipolarity in the institutions best able to deal with ethnic diversity. One (complete fragmentation) is to be found in empires. The other (homogeneity) is surprisingly a course advocated by Keynes during the Second World War when speculating about political postwar order in Europe.

But this homogenized solution, which as Keynes recognized could involve “ethnic cleansing,” has clearly been eschewed by the West—as witness its actions in Bosnia and Kosovo. This reflects the hopes of much progressive thought over the last two centuries, stemming from the Enlightenment, that transnational and “modern” forms of association such as “class” would transcend primordial forms of association such as “ethnicity” and “culture”—of which nationalism is an offshoot. But contemporary history continues to show the power of these primordial forces.

So, at least in principle, the Keynes solution seems to be in keeping with human nature. As in a globalized economy size does not matter for prosperity—demonstrated by the shining examples of the city states of Hong Kong and Singapore—cultural self-determination would also be feasible as long as there is someone to maintain a global pax.

However, the events in Bosnia and Kosovo show that in fact the United States and its allies have, rightly in my view, chosen to impose a regional pax by partially reconstructing parts of the Balkan Austro-Hungarian empire. The high representative of the UN in Bosnia and the chief administrator of Kosovo are the equivalent of British viceroys in areas of direct and political agents in those of indirect imperialism. Similarly the recent Afghan peace is underwritten by an Allied police force and another form of indirect imperialism, much as the British sought to do through their residents in Afghanistan during their imperium.

IV

But even if there is a case for Pax Americana to maintain global peace between states, international property rights, and to prevent ethnic conflicts, would it not lead, as Paul Kennedy argued in the late 1980s, to “imperial overstretch” and the nationalist backlash which has undermined past empires and which U.S. foreign policy has tolerated if not promoted?

It is apparent that, on past and current performance and future prospects, the only potential competitors to U.S. military power are the Chinese (by perhaps mid-century) and the Indians by the end of the century. Given the U.S. technological lead, these potential dates for catch-up are likely to be even later. So that for at least this century it is unlikely that U.S. military power is likely to be challenged.

One of the strengths of the U.S. is that in its public and increasingly private philosophy, racism no longer plays a part—witness that two of the leading lights dealing with foreign policy today are Afro-Americans. Moreover, the U.S. has now moved to recognizing dual citizenship, as have many other countries—witness even the most nationalist like India planning to follow. With the growth of a cosmopolitan class of primarily U.S.-trained technicians and executives, culturally and often personally linked, who work in many different countries, there is already in existence the core of a global “Roman” political and economic elite—open to the talents—which could run this new U.S. imperium.

But even granted all this, will not a U.S. imperium lead to a coalition forming against it? Envy, jealousy, even hatred are the inevitable and unenviable consequence of disparities in economic and military power. But should the dominant economic and military power then actively seek to become poorer and weaker so it may be loved, or to prevent other powers “ganging up” against it in the future? Or should it instead try to use its hegemony to bring along the other great powers into a concert maintaining the global pax as the British did in the nineteenth century, recognizing that its dominance will lead both to emulation by many—the “so

power” that idealists so often talk about—but also fear and loathing among others. Preventing the latter from spilling over into global disorder has in fact been one of the essential tasks of imperial statesmanship. But to undertake it sensibly one has to recognize that one is an imperial power. “Empires come before imperialism.” The nub of my case is that the U.S., like any other economically and militarily dominant powers in the past, has acquired an empire, but it is reluctant to face up to the resulting imperial responsibilities because in its domestic discourse it refuses to face up to the reality. This would involve developing a theory for the beneficent exercise of its imperial power. Wishing the empire would just go away, or can be managed by global love and compassion, is not only to bury one’s head in the sand but actually to promote global disorder.

In fact, if we look at the current threats to global or regional political and economic order, there would seem to be a convergence rather than divergence in the interests of the U.S. and other potential great powers. There are clearly two major regions of the world where disorder rules. First, the vast region spanning the Islamic world in the Middle East and Central Asia, and second, the continent of Africa.

We can be brief in dealing with Africa, because (sadly) with the ending of the cold war, it does not represent a strategic challenge to any of the potential great powers we had identified earlier. Its strategic importance in the nineteenth century lay in guarding the sea lanes to India—the jewel in the British imperial crown. That reason no longer applies. Apart from justified humanitarian concerns about the plight of its people, there is little that the rest of the world has to lose or gain from engaging or disengaging from Africa. Given the dismal failure of the Western development program in Africa, based on conditional aid channeled through governments run by predatory elites, little short of costly direct imperialism is likely to provide that good governance which everyone now maintains is the prerequisite for the economic advancement of the continent.

For the U.S. and the world, the best policy towards Africa, if

direct imperialism is ruled out as being too costly, is to keep markets for African goods and capital flows to Africa open, and leave it to the Africans to sort out their own problems.

The Islamic world poses a more serious challenge. In rightly trying to distinguish the direct threats posed to national and global security after September 11 from Islamists, as distinct from Islam—in no small measure to protect the substantial Muslim minorities in many Western countries—many commentators and world leaders have gone out of their way to say that, in the “war of terror,” the enemy is not Islam. At one level this is true. But once one seeks to understand the reason for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and its seeming attraction to large numbers in Muslim countries, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that it has something to do with the nature of Islam itself.

Until the Muslim world wholeheartedly embraces modernization, recognizing that this does not involve Westernization and the giving up of its soul, there is little hope of the Islamist threat to other Muslims and the rest of the modern world being eliminated. But how is this modernization to come about?

Here we have briefly to go back to the world created in the Middle East with the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire. Apart from Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, the rest of the states in the Middle East today are the artificial creations of the victorious powers that dismembered the Ottoman empire. Thus Iraq, instead of being—as Saddam Hussein has claimed—the successor state of Nebuchadnezzar, was put together by Britain as a unit containing Kurdish, Sunni, and Shia tribes. This artificial tribal confederation has always been brittle, and its unity has been maintained not by any national feeling but by tribal deals and most recently by terror.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also not the descendant of any ancient Arab state, but the result of a religious movement—the Wahabis (an extreme version of Islam) creating a state in central Arabia in the eighteenth century. Then oil was discovered, extracted, and exported by Western companies, and by 1960 the total Middle Eastern oil reserves were estimated to be about 60 percent

of known world reserves. Given the erosion of international rules concerning property rights, and the growth of statism, the Saudi oil fields along with others in Iraq and Iran were nationalized. The Saudis were moreover protected by the U.S.

September 11 finally showed up the dangers in this Faustian pact. It concerns both money and ideology. The Saudis have maintained a tightrope act for half a century. They have balanced their alliance with the infidels and the untold riches they provide the dynasty, by maintaining what is probably the most virulent and medieval form of Islam in their own country, and using their newfound wealth to propagate it through financing mosques and Wahabi preachers around the world.

For the rest of the world, the poison being spread by this Wahabi evangelism is becoming intolerable. To see how pernicious it is, imagine what we would think if German schools just had lessons in anti-Semitism, or those in America were just teaching the young to hate blacks. But this is what the large number of madrasas funded by the Saudis, in Pakistan and many other countries around the world, are teaching. If there is to be an end to the "war of terror," this poisoning of the Muslim mind clearly has to stop.

But numerous commentators have argued that the reason why this poison is still being successfully spread is the continuing Arab-Israeli confrontation and the anger this arouses in the Arab street, which provides the Islamists with an unlimited supply of jihadis. Without going into the historical rights and wrongs of the issue—on which I have always believed the Arabs have a rightful grievance—there are two reasons why in my view this issue (despite Arab rhetoric) is merely another symptom of the failure of both the Islamic world to come to terms with modernity as well as the common tactic used by the third world to externalize its domestic problems.

The only solution to the Arab-Israeli problem, therefore, also lies in the Muslim world coming to terms with modernity. But this in turn requires that the Saudi and Iraqi direct and indirect support for the "intifada" must end. What this suggests is that the

current status quo in the Middle East is untenable. The primary task of a Pax Americana must be to find ways to create a new order in the Middle East, where the cosmological beliefs are preserved but the prosperity engendered by modernity leads to the ending of the belief in jihad, thus easing the confusion in the Islamic world which has plagued it for over a century.

It is accusingly said by many that any such rearrangement of the status quo would be an act of imperialism and would largely be motivated by the desire to control Middle Eastern oil. But far from being objectionable, imperialism is precisely what is needed to restore order in the Middle East.

This is not the occasion to discuss the mechanics of the exercise of imperial power to reorder the Middle East to allow its people and those of the world to prosper under an American pax. But there is this question: in this task of establishing a Middle Eastern pax, will the U.S. have to act alone? If one looks at a map of the Middle East, and sees the countries currently threatened by the spread of Islamist hatred, they comprise Russia, China, India, and of course embattled Israel. If the maintenance of global order in the near future therefore means countering this Islamo-fascism, clearly the U.S. is not going to find a coalition against it forming with these potential great powers. Deals will no doubt have to be cut on the side, but there is no real conflict of interests which would allow a hostile coalition to build up against the United States on this issue.

One can draw one's own conclusions. But it does seem laudable that some in the U.S. administration may at long last be taking the imperial task seriously.

v

There are those of course who still believe that moral persuasion will be enough to solve the Arab-Israeli dispute, and together with the use of sanctions bring order in the Middle East. The Europeans in particular are vociferous adherents of the Wilsonian order with their demand for multilateral action through the UN. But

is just the usual tactic of the weak: to tie Gulliver down with a million strings so that he cannot move. As in terms of military and economic power the Europeans are increasingly becoming second order powers, it is unlikely that any lack of support on their part will endanger an American pax. No doubt, as they have done for many years, they will continue to be free riders on whatever pax is created. So I think the fears of those who worry that an assertive America will provoke an aggressive countercoalition against itself are exaggerated.

After September 11, despite much continuing ambivalence, at long last the United States seems to be awaking from the Wilsonian dream and realizing that it has a unique responsibility—like the British in the nineteenth century—to maintain global order. It, as I have been at pains to emphasize, this implies the promotion of modernization—particularly in the Muslim world—but not Westernization. It is, however, the continuing domestic resonance of the “idealism” in its foreign policy emphasized by Woodrow Wilson which has the potential of undermining this emerging pax: creating a backlash if the modernization which is required is inflated with Westernization.

Given its domestic homogenizing imperial tendencies, the U.S. (along with various other Western countries) is attempting to legitimate its “habits of the heart” around the world—“human rights,” democracy, egalitarianism, labor, and environmental standards. Its claim that it is thereby promoting universal values is unjustified.

For there is an important difference between the cosmological beliefs of what became the Christian West and the other ancient Eurasian civilizations of Eurasia. Christianity has a number of distinctive features which it shares with its Semitic cousin Islam, but not entirely with its parent Judaism, and which are not to be found in any of the other great Eurasian religions. The most important is universality. Neither the Jews nor the Hindu or Sinic civilizations had religions claiming to be universal. You could not choose to be a Hindu, Chinese, or Jew; you were born as one. This also meant that, unlike Christianity and Islam, these religions did not proselytize. Third, only the Semitic religions, being monotheistic,

have also been egalitarian. Nearly all the other Eurasian religions (apart from Buddhism) believed in some form of hierarchical social order. By contrast, alone among the Eurasian civilizations, the Semitic ones (though least so the Jewish) emphasized the equality of men’s souls in the eyes of their monotheistic deities. The so-called universal values being promoted by the West are no more than the culture-specific, proselytizing ethic of what remains at heart Western Christendom. Nor is there a necessary connection as the West claims between democracy and development. If democracy is to be preferred as a form of government, it is not because of its instrumental value in promoting prosperity—at times it may well not—but because it promotes a different Western value—liberty. Again, many civilizations have placed social order above this value, and again it would be imperialistic for the West to ask them to change their ways.

If the West ties its moral crusade too closely to the emerging processes of globalization and modernization, there is a danger that there will also be a backlash against the process of globalization. This potential cultural imperialism poses a greater danger to the acceptance of a new Pax Americana in developing countries, particularly in the Muslim countries, than the unfounded fears of their cultural nationalists that the modernization promoted by globalization will lead to the erosion of cherished national cultures.

My conclusions can be brief. Empires have unfairly got a bad name, not least in U.S. domestic politics. This is particularly unfortunate, as the world needs an American pax to provide both global peace and prosperity. The arguments that this is too costly have been found to be wanting. However, if instead of this pax the U.S. seeks to create an international moral order by attempting to legislate its “habits of the heart” through ethical imperialism, it is likely to breed disorder. The most urgent task in the new imperium is to bring the world of Islam into the modern world without seeking to alter its soul.

I have given reasons to believe that the United States should be able to fulfill this imperial task. But is it willing? Given the contin-

uing resonance of Wilsonian moralism in public discourse, I am doubtful. A beginning would be the acceptance in domestic politics that the U.S. is an imperial power. The real debate about how best to use that power could then sensibly ensue.