

## *The Impossibility of American Empire*

Paris, October 30, 2007 – Since the return of democracy in Spain, Spain's political leaders and political society have demonstrated an extraordinary determination to start anew, after the crisis-afflicted 75 years that began with what the Spaniards have called "the catastrophe" – the collapse of the Spanish empire under blows from an exuberant and adolescent United States that believed it was coming of age as a world power. It's evidence that empires end, but nations don't, and resurrection is possible.

America's transcontinental expansion following the Civil War and the garish joys of the Gilded Age gave Americans a taste for foreign adventure, whetted by the proximity and vulnerability of Cuba. And if Cuba, why not Puerto Rico, and the Philippines? Admiral Alfred Mahan, America's prophet of naval power and of the economic necessity of colonialism, offered convincing economic reasons for American colonial expansion, and the failing Spanish empire was at hand.

A blow to it in the Caribbean, and another in Manila Bay, was enough for it to splinter and collapse. The Spanish Caribbean and the Philippines were ours.

Every empire has its day, and Spain's phenomenal empire had its during the four centuries that followed the expeditions of Columbus, sailing westward. 1492, and the riches of South American gold, led eventually, and one can say inexorably, to failure in 1898. All things come to an end. You live to die, a principle unpopular among Americans.

The Empire of the United States was launched in 1898, and has since traversed a mere century, experiencing increasing ambition, and suffering increasing difficulties. Could it too last 406 years? The current evidence is not reassuring.

Take the capacity to rule. Take the current Republican party candidates for their party's presidential nomination. The level of intelligence, emotional and intellectual maturity, and simple information about the subjects on which they discourse, would disqualify them from mainstream political rank in any other major democracy.

This is seriously distressing – although in principle a soluble problem, since there are plenty of intelligent people in the United States, as well as great universities and a rich culture. But elected U.S. government has been so debased by the national willingness to submit elections to the values and habits of a medium of entertainment, television, and to the corruptions of money, that it is hard to see that such a nation can indefinitely maintain representative government.

The Bush administration has demonstrated that major groups and forces in American society indeed do not wish that form of government to survive, and are deliberately engaged in destroying the constitutional order, undermining the powers of Congress and of the courts, so as to install unchecked executive power, rationalized by a novel and authoritarian legal ideology, and sustained by national security demagoguery.

I have not spoken of the Democratic candidates for president in the same way because the party's

candidates and debate have not descended to quite the abysmal levels of the Republican pre-primary campaign. But the Democratic party is equally complicit in degrading and subverting the electoral debate and practice of the country, since its candidates are unwilling or unable to challenge the American imperial ideology that drives the country's foreign policy, an ideology of permanent, unchallengeable global military supremacy.

This ideology is plainly written out in the American Defense Department's periodical statements of U.S. National Security Strategy, in the latest of which the previously stated goal of "security" in space has now become "supremacy" in space (as everywhere else).

The most influential ground force doctrine foresees decades of American asymmetrical war against urban insurgents springing up in radicalized or "failed" states around the world (including Europe, which the authors of this ideology of an unending World War IV predict will soon be reduced to helotry in service to an "Islamofascist" Caliphate. This hysterical American dystopia feeds fantasies of conquest to its Islamic enemies that the enemies themselves could not imagine. Paranoia reigns in some American circles, close to leading Republican candidates.

All this might be taken as reason for American fear of what is to come. But the dystopic future thus described is impossible. What can come is a United States that burns itself out in the attempt to deal with its paranoid fantasies.

The United States already wages two wasting wars that make no sense. It will never, itself, dominate the disintegrative forces in Iraq today. In Afghanistan it will never succeed in defeating a Taliban radicalism that represents a real if obscurantist national affirmation by a 40-million strong Pathan ethnic community that has always been the dominant force in its historical homeland.

It is not a question of whether these American objectives should be done. That is irrelevant, since they can't be done. They are impossibilities.

The United States government, in its effort to execute its national security strategy of dominating and defeating global radicalism and extremism, is currently directly attempting to manipulate and control the internal political processes of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and Hezbollah, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya; and indirectly it attempts to exercise decisive influence on the affairs of Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Yemen, Libya, the Gulf Emirates, and a non-existent Kurdistan – and this is to take only a single zone of the world.

This is what the War on Terror has come to mean. It is an attempt to create a universal empire that exists only in the American imagination, by an effort that, because its aim is impossible to achieve, is unlimited in the damage it could do to Americans and others.

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