

# The American Empire in the New Century

## Hegemony or Domination?

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter analyzes the current position of United States supremacy, in light of the debate on hegemony and domination that acquires greater relevance after the formulation of the 'Bush Doctrine', which is systematized in the document 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America'. Our approach will emphasize the following aspects: establishment of a parallel between the transition from the 19th to the 20th centuries, from studies that point out the characteristics of imperialism at different times; an analysis of the current foreign policies of the United States, focusing on the debate between unilateralism and multilateralism, emphasizing the reactions caused by the intervention in Iraq; a critical argument about the approaches that highlight in the security agenda of the Bush administration an indicator of a loss of hegemony, which would impose open domination over the search for consensus.*

**Keywords:** Bush Doctrine, hegemony, imperialism, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Samuel Huntington

The end of the bipolar world, in which attention was mainly concentrated on debates concerning the structure of international relations in the second half of the 20th century, has facilitated the rebirth of imperialism as a point of reflection on the international world order.

For many analysts, conservatives and anti-capitalists, the present unquestionable supremacy of this system, added to the emergence of the United States as the only global superpower, has hastened an inquiry into its historical significance: this new age either as the beginning of a period of peace and prosperity or, conversely as the end of a model of civilization which was fomented by the West.

Obviously, it is not the first time in the history of capitalism that these questions have been seen as relevant. The same dilemma has accompanied the debates concerning the longevity of the system, as well as the structural possibilities of western hegemony from the 19th to the 20th centuries. In that context,

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as well as in the present one, emergent approaches whose capacity to distinguish the old from the new transform them into a 'trademark' of the spirit of an age, even though they give rise to considerable controversy about their theoretical validity.

Two authors that conform to this category are Vladimir Lenin and Samuel Huntington. Faced with the impasse of the Second International, due to the considerable controversy regarding the impact of the systemic changes in the strategy of the socialist revolution, Lenin's theses laid the foundations of the political program which guided the Bolshevik victory in Russia. Faced with the crisis in the Cold War paradigm, Huntington's theses concerning a clash of civilizations shift the focus from international economic and ideological conflicts to cultural aspects, proposing a new approach regarding the national interests of the USA. Its influence in the country's foreign policy has become the focus of ever increasing attention, especially after the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington.

### **Lenin: Imperialism and Social Revolution**

At the end of the 19th century, in the midst of the Socialist International, theorists such as Edward Bernstein, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky and Vladimir Lenin, turned their attention to the study of new capitalistic dynamics, as a necessary premise to formulate political strategies that would respond to the challenges of the order that was developing.

The following aspects created antagonistic responses within the socialist movement, sparking an important debate about the constant expansion of the system at an international level, the aggressive policy of emergent powers like Germany, who sought empire; the considerable economic growth of the central countries, the stabilization of internal politics, the efficient organization of the working class and the improvement in their standard of living, that would enable them to have small participation in the profits caused by the imperial expansion.

Edward Bernstein saw the expansion of capitalism as the extension of civilization to underdeveloped countries. The legalist perspective of the socialist's actions in parliament and in trade unions, as well as the support for representative democracy, suggested the possibility of humanizing the system through a redistribution of wealth. When this expansion manifested itself as a warlike foreign policy, he, together with the majority of the German Social Democratic party, supported national imperialism, which led to the First World War.

Other authors reach opposite conclusions from this same context. Rosa Luxemburg attempted to explain the expansion of capitalism as something inherent to this system. Therefore, imperialism is not simply an option among other foreign policies, but a vital necessity for the system, which needs other, non-capitalist markets to absorb the surplus value that cannot be carried out in

their countries of origin. Once expansion is completed and the world is fully integrated to capitalist reasoning, the inexistence of this third market will make its accumulating capacity unfeasible. This will result in total collapse, revolutions and wars for the re-division of the world.

Moreover, concerning a critical perspective, Lenin describes the characteristics which he considers fundamental in the context of the world economy. Despite recognizing that the expansion of capitalism tends to alleviate internal contradictions in developed countries, allowing distribution of income and favoring reformist policies from socialist parties, this does not mean the beginning of an era of permanent stabilization of the system or the aging of the idea of a socialist revolution.

In addition to the prosperity of the central countries and the ‘working class aristocracy’, imperialism introduces a new international division of work which the world shares between the great capitalist powers, dislocating the acute symptoms concerning the seriousness of the central crisis to the periphery of the system. This is where the weak links of the imperialist chain lie, together with the objective conditions of the revolution.

For both Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin, imperialism means denial, by means of external expansion, of the internal contradictions concerning the capitalist way of production in the industrial countries. However, Rosa Luxemburg’s analysis considers capitalist free competition, added to the fact that the circulation of goods guides international economic relations. Lenin, on the other hand, sees imperialism as a specific phase of capitalism in which some of its fundamental characteristics undermine the system:

- a) Capitalism can no longer be associated with free competition as groups that concentrate industrial and banking capital collaborate with each other to compete for market leadership, at the same time that capitalist states are prepared to fight for world hegemony.
- b) The main objective of international economic relations between central and peripheral countries is not to export goods in exchange for raw materials. Together with the increasing need to control essential sources of raw materials to industrial development, what prevails is the export of capital.

In the author’s words:

Imperialism is capitalism reaching a development stage in which the dominance of monopolies and financial capital is confirmed; whereby the export of capital has taken on a major importance; whereby the division of the world between the international trusts began; and whereby the division of the world between the major powers has been accomplished. (Lenin, 1979: 88)

### **Empire, Hegemony and Clash of Civilizations: The Contemporary Debate**

Analysts of the most recent evolution of capitalism, such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001), consider that the imperialist phase characterized by Lenin has come to an end. According to them, the territorial expansion stimulated by the nation-states has been replaced by the all embracing Empire. There is no place outside it, as the supremacy of the world market has settled in, making the divide between countries based on traditional notions of world hierarchy obsolete. In the new world order, the difference between internal and external space has lost its meaning.

According to the approaches that try to legitimize the new reality, the Empire represents the end of history; in this sense, the authors recognize concrete bases that support perspectives like that of Fukuyama's, for whom alternatives to capitalism definitively disappeared, eliminating the bases of conflict originated from forces external to the system. According to Hardt and Negri (2001), who are among the critics of the order, the Empire represents progress in relation to imperialism, in the same way that capitalism expresses an evolutionary process over the ways of production which existed before.

Unlike the authors of *Empire*, who question the relevance of perspectives oriented by the logic of the nation-states, Arrighi and Silver focus their analysis on contemporary capitalism concerning the role of its supreme power, which is considered to be in a state of systemic crisis. Analyzing the Dutch-British and British-American hegemonic transition periods, one can see the existence of comparable patterns of crisis and reorganization highlighted by 'three different processes, but which are strictly related: the intensification of inter-state and inter-enterprise competition; an uprising of social conflicts, and the interstitial emergence of new power configurations' (2001: 39).

Apart from the specifications of each historical situation, the three hegemonic crises reveal, as a common element, periods of financial expansions that make it possible for the dominant leader to ensure privileged access to world financial resources which in turn temporarily postpones of the end of the leader's dominance.

They believe the contemporary setting of this financial expansion, in which the United States is the center, represents a sign of a hegemonic crisis, but also presents some peculiarities in relation to the previous phases:

- 1) The declining power does not have competitors regarding military forces, but has become administratively dependent on other capital generating centers such as Western Europe and Japan for power administration and financial resources.
- 2) Unlike the globalization process of the last decades of the 19th century, when the nation-states were fundamental protagonists in terms of internationalizing capital, their power had been reduced to the detriment of the transnational private sector.

- 3) Compared to the surge in social conflicts that took place in the Dutch-British transition period, especially the ones linked to the anti-slavery dispute and the workers movement, the authors identify a conjectural loss of power of social movements. On the other hand, the structurally negative effects concerning contemporary global configuration create new sources of conflict which have no immediate solution.
- 4) In previous hegemonic transitions, the emergence of a new power accelerated the collapse of the old power: Britain in relation to the Netherlands, the United States in relation to Britain. Although the authors have highlighted the increasing economic expansion of eastern Asia, it does not threaten the United States military force. This situation marked a peculiar watershed in the present change in the world system, and its end could be problematic, depending on the United States' attitude.

This nation is much more capable than Great Britain ever was a hundred years ago to convert its decreasing hegemony into an exploratory domination. If the system collapses, it will mainly be due to the North American resistance in adapting and conciliating. Moreover, on the other hand the American adaptation and conciliation to the increasing economic power of the Eastern Asia region is essential for a non-catastrophic transition towards a new world order. (Arrighi and Silver, 2001: 298)

From a conservative perspective, Samuel Huntington calls attention to the negative consequences of unilateralism of United States' foreign policies in the post-Cold War period. Unlike Arrighi and Silver, who reference what they consider a crisis of contemporary hegemonic power, Huntington is concerned about the factors that can break the continuity of western civilization and, consequently, of the United States as a nation.

In an article published in 1993 in *Foreign Affairs*, Huntington proposed a new approach concerning the dynamics of international relations, encouraging a lengthy debate. In his description of the New World Order, four aspects are emphasized: 1) the defeat of the principal enemy of capitalism, responsible for the economic system that questioned private property as a means of production; 2) the global dissemination of the logic of the market; 3) the control of multilateral economic institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO) by the advanced capitalist countries; 4) the conquest of military supremacy by NATO.

In these circumstances, he considers that the main sources of conflicts in this configuration are not political, ideological or economic, but come from borderlines which separate various cultures and civilizations: western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic Orthodox, Latin American and African.

According to Huntington, the idea that the defeat of the Soviet enemy eliminates the last obstacle to the triumphant progress of liberal democracy, of

market capitalism and western values is questionable. Going against nationalist attitudes, he opposes the thesis of the end of history, highlighting the genocides that emerged after the fall of the Berlin wall. They were, he said, much more common than in any other period of the Cold War: 'The paradigm of only one harmonious world is clearly too divorced from reality to be a useful guide in the post Cold War world' (1997: 33).

In a world order where the main sources of conflicts are cultural, the affirmation of identity acquires special relevance, which implies specific developments concerning the definition of the national interest. Referring to the United States, Huntington highlights the necessity of establishing a consensus regarding the bases of the country's culture, before defining what their interests are. Nevertheless, as the author recognizes, 'we only know who we are when we know who we are not and, many times, when we know who we are against' (1997: 20).

At the end of the Cold War, the 'other', who embodied the denial of the American way of life and justified the necessity of a united and militant national posture, disappeared. The demographic transformations, which had new, predominantly Hispanic migrations, influenced racial, religious and ethnic changes, which can pose obstacles to the traditional role of the country in assimilating other cultures. Having this perspective in mind, the affirmation of identity requires a new boundary of borders in relation to the others.

This task has international and domestic dimensions. The world of civilizations is a field of many uncertainties, where the action of actors responds to several types of rationalities, much more complex than the bipolar logic of the Cold War. Knowing yourself and knowing others requires being cautious. Concerning foreign policies, Huntington recommends a neo-isolationist posture. The United States ought to recognize the civilization areas and their respective central states, avoiding being involved in internal conflicts of other civilizations.

Referring to the United States international position after the end of the Cold War, Huntington identifies three stages: 1) a brief unipolar moment, exemplified in the intervention in the first Gulf War; 2) a unimultipolar system in progress, which prepares the transition to a, 3) multipolar stage. According to him, there is a contradiction between the contemporary unimultipolar system and foreign policies adopted by the Clinton administration, which typically has unipolar characteristics, in an interventionist situation that results in the traditional allies being dissatisfied and which stimulates solidarity among the opponents.

In the past few years the United States has, among other things, attempted or been perceived as attempting more or less unilaterally to do the following: pressure other countries to adopt American values and practices regarding human rights and democracy; prevent other countries from acquiring military capacities that could counter American conventional superiority; enforce

American law extraterritorially in other societies; grade countries according to their adherence to American standards on human rights, drugs, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, missile proliferation, and now religious freedom; apply sanctions against countries that do not meet American standards on these issues; promote American corporate interests under the slogans of free trade and open markets; shape World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies to serve those same corporate interests; intervene in local conflicts in which it has relatively little direct interest; bludgeon other countries to adopt economic policies and social policies that will benefit American economic interests; promote American arms sales abroad while attempting to prevent comparable sales by other countries; . . . and categorize certain countries as 'rogue states', excluding them from global institutions because they refuse to kowtow to American wishes. (Huntington, 1999: 48)

Referring to the context post-9/11 and the debate around the suitable positions for the defense of the national interests of the United States, Huntington points out three main alternatives: 1) cosmopolitan, that would involve a renewal of the conceptions of opening to the world previous to the terrorists attacks; 2) imperial, tied with the conservative sectors in the George W. Bush government, through which the country searches to remake the world to its image and similarity; 3) national, closer to its perspective, that intends to preserve and enhance the values, principles and qualities which exist in the origin of the construction of the nation.

Cosmopolitanism and imperialism attempt to reduce or to eliminate the social, political, and cultural differences between America and other societies. A national approach would recognize and accept what distinguishes America from other societies. America cannot become the world and still be America. Other peoples cannot become American and still be themselves. America is different, and that difference is defined in large part by its Anglo-Protestant culture and religiosity. (Huntington, 2004: 364–5)

That perspective carries the author to assume a tone of strong concern regarding the domestic factors that threaten national identity, focusing on two major challenges: 1) the attitude of intellectuals and social movements which, in the name of multiculturalism, attack the American affiliation with the West, defending programs of quotas which open doors to work and education, based on criteria that favor groups which considered themselves historically discriminated by the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) elite; 2) the dangers represented by the increasing Hispanic presence in the country.

Due to their demographic expansion, higher than that of other national ethnic groups, or because of the dissemination of values and attitudes which reject the 'pillars' that are supposed to be the basis of the Anglo-Protestant society, such as English as a common language and education and hard work

that lead to material prosperity, Huntington concludes that the growth of the Latin American population, specially Mexican, tends to become one of the threats to the cultural continuity of the United States as a nation.

The continuation of high levels of Mexican and Hispanic immigration plus the low rates of assimilation of these immigrants into American society and culture could eventually change America into a country of two languages, two cultures, and two peoples. This will not only transform America. It will also have deep consequences for Hispanics, who will be in America but not of it . . . There is only the American dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society. Mexican-Americans will share that dream and in that society only if they dream in English. (Huntington, 2004: 256)

### **Ideas and Material Force**

Despite the differences in historic contexts and theoretical and political affiliation, both Lenin and Huntington share the same belief regarding the systemic dangers resulting from imperialist policies of the dominating powers in each period.

Lenin's approach transcends the specific context in which it was formulated. It becomes a reference point for later attempts of characterizing world capitalism. This happens for a fundamental reason: his analysis becomes 'material force', supplying a theoretical basis for a political strategy combating the pro-war positions in the Second International, contributing to transform the world war into a revolutionary war in one of the weak links of the imperialist chain – Russia. This gave Lenin's thoughts an indisputable authority, and more importantly, produced a substantial change in the international situation from the First World War. There is a national space of opposition to the capitalist order, with progressive international influence, orienting its foreign policies on theoretical principles which explicitly show its original source in Lenin.

In spite of the controversies regarding the general collapse implicit in the terms 'superior stage' or 'final phase', it is recognized that between the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, international relations were totally influenced by the expansionism of the great powers and the struggle by the capital monopolies to control markets, thus reconfiguring it as a qualitative change in capitalism's evolution (Ayerbe, 2001).

The significant repercussion of Huntington's theses in the debates concerning the new configuration of international relations after the end of bipolarity has not been free of controversy, with criticisms that range from the absence of conceptual rigor in the characterization of existing civilizations to the adoption of a cultural view with clear ideological connotations, exalting the virtues of 'western civilization' as opposed to the 'rest', and influencing isolationist attitudes in foreign policies, increased by discriminatory arguments in relation to other civilizations (Ayerbe, 2003).

Without considering the validity of these questionings, and evaluated in the light of its explicit defense of American national interests, Huntington's analysis presents a far-reaching rational strategy which seems relevant.

To the author, the defeat of the Soviet Union placed the West in a situation of unquestionable global supremacy. As there is no enemy superpower in the system, the unconditional supports and the notion of a 'guardian of the free world' lose meaning. World affairs acquire another dimension; loss and damage in market competitiveness, or situations of political instability generating regional conflicts, are not seen using an ideological lens. In this context, assuming missionary perspectives can lead the last superpower to a process of isolation. The administration of hegemony requires careful work regarding a generation of new allies and negotiating treatment of the divergences, aiming at softening or, better, eliminating the antagonistic character of contradictions, which if unresolved make the arrogant and interventionist attitudes counterproductive. In the roots of its culturalism, there is an increasing concern about the new sources of conflict that, although they do not question the system, can affect the governance. According to Huntington, after the victories of the Cold War, there is nothing decisive to be conquered.

Following this idea, there is a substantial difference regarding Arrighi and Silver's analysis, which cites contemporary references in the history of capitalism of what they consider to be a crisis of North American hegemony. Huntington's main concern is not the external threats. Although he calls attention to the increasing power of China, he does not see possible risks, which can question the existence of the system. The main dilemma is the continuity of cultural foundations, which made western civilization, and the United States, world leaders. Once the apex of this course is reached, how can one avoid the signs of decadence that are present in some values and behaviors, which tend to undermine the national identity?

At an international level, the considerable increase in the gap between the rich and the poor, one of the tendencies of present world reality on which there is consensus, indicates that prosperity proclaimed by the victory of liberal capitalism is structurally limited. From this point of view, what use is there in creating expectations regarding the inevitable global dissemination of the 'American way of life'?

Unlike Hardt and Negri, Huntington has no doubts about the imperialist character of the integrated action involving the state, the private sector and multilateral organizations. The imposition of economic models, which in the name of market freedom, basically encourages maximum profits for United States companies abroad, can have harmful consequences in countries and regions that do not have much ability to adapt to global competitiveness, thus highlighting the disparities between the rich and the poor and contributing to fundamentalist feelings.

Based on these presuppositions, he explicitly criticizes the 'end of

history' approach, typical of the western imperialist tradition, which prescribes universal models of human behavior in society for the rest of the world. Although this perspective may be considered valid in other contexts, helping to encourage its expansion, it is no longer advisable. At an international level, due to the aforementioned internal consequences, it stimulates an intellectual setting that has become accustomed to enjoying victory and the loss of vigilance in relation to the enemies.

### **Unilateralism versus Multilateralism: The Bush Doctrine**

Conservatives have criticized the incoherent policies of the Clinton Administration. They have also resisted isolationist impulses from within their own ranks. But conservatives have not confidently advanced a strategic vision of America's role in the world. They have not set forth guiding principles for American foreign policy. They have allowed differences over tactics to obscure potential agreement on strategic objectives. And they have not fought for a defense budget that would maintain American security and advance American interests in the new century. We aim to change this. We aim to make the case and rally support for American global leadership. (Project for the New American Century)<sup>1</sup>

The foreign policy of the United States during the Bush administration deepens the interventionist tendencies criticized by Huntington in its references to the Clinton period. From the beginning of his term in office, Bush has encouraged lengthy debates surrounding the dichotomy between unilateralism and multilateralism. Since his first year in government, he has redefined the position of the country towards important international treaties, indicating various differences in relation to the previous administration, such as the decisions against the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, the creation of the International Criminal Court and the proposal to revise the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty.

The 11 September attacks in 2001 have reinforced this course, contributing to consolidating positions that would make the United States mainly responsible for the vigilance and punishment of the enemies of the order, not as guardians of the 'free world', but as protectors of the borders that separate 'civilization' from 'barbarianism'.

Despite the international support received by the United States in the Afghanistan attack, a quick military victory has strengthened unilateralism. The result is the formulation of a new concept in the orientation of international relations, which is known as the 'Bush doctrine', whose immediate target was Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime.

As it is made explicit in the document *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, published by the White House in September 2002, deterrence and containment, which guided foreign policy during the Cold War,

(however valid in some situations) lose their central role to preemption, which justifies attacking states and organizations suspected of planning hostile acts against the country or its allies.

In the Cold War, especially following the Cuban missile crisis, we faced a generally status quo, risk-averse adversary. Deterrence was an effective defense. But deterrence based only upon the threat of retaliation is less likely to work against leaders of rogue states more willing to take risks, gambling with the lives of their people, and the wealth of their nations . . . To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively. (The White House, 2002: 15)

The new attitude of the United States government has been fuelled by the exaltation of the virtues of capitalism and liberal democracy, ‘pillars’ of a way of life that intends to be universal: ‘The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise’ (The White House, 2002: 1).

The option for unilateralism, presented as an inevitable cost in the combat against new forms of terrorism, has received fierce criticism from the former administration staff, which favored a multilateral concept of international relations. According to Joseph Nye, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs during the Clinton government, unilateralism may be undermining the basis of soft power in the country, based on the attraction exerted by their values, institutions and ideology, leading to a less-than-smart exacerbation of hard power, associated with the capacity to induce certain behaviors. For him:

The Bush administration has correctly identified the nature of the new challenges that the nation faces and has reoriented American strategy accordingly. But the administration, like the Congress and the public, has been torn between different approaches to the implementation of the new strategy. The result has been a mixture of successes and failures. We have been more successful in the domain of hard power, where we have invested more, trained more, and have a clear idea of what we are doing. We have been less successful in the areas of soft power, where our public diplomacy has been woefully inadequate and our neglect of allies and institutions has created a sense of illegitimacy that has squandered our attractiveness. (Nye, 2004: 146–7)

The new doctrine’s logic was well summed up by former Deputy Secretary of Defense and now President of the World Bank, Paul Wolfowitz, for whom the United States had a leadership role when protecting interests that involved the international community, fighting against hostile countries which encourage terrorism.

Military power is a much more defensive tool. So the real power of the United States is not its military power. The real power of the United States I think is more important than military power is our economic power and more powerful than both I think is our political strength and what we stand for and the fact that all around the world even in some countries where the regimes hate the people admire our system and want our kind of system . . . there are differences of interests between countries, but because of the way we define our interest, there's a sort of natural compatibility interest between the United States and most countries of the world. (Quoted in Gardels, 2002)

According to Wolfowitz, there is no unilateralism, but genuine exercise of power on behalf of a State, which uses its force in the name of general interest. To him, United States military power 'It is sort of like a protective fence around things. It allows you to set certain boundaries and it allows the idea of large armies crossing borders' (Gardels, 2002).

In a similar perspective, David Frum and Richard Perle (2004), respectively former Presidential Speechwriter and Pentagon Policy Adviser in the Bush administration, consider that the big signal of 9/11 is the loss of capacity to contain the terrorist threat within tolerable borders, thus demanding a change of strategy. In this direction, depending on the position of each country in the war against terrorism, the authors recommend three kinds of actions. In relation to those states that face the threat inside their boundaries with decision, the United States has to supply the necessary support. In the case of the governments that are conciliatory with terrorism, they will have to expect the rigor of the American retaliation. On the other hand, in the situations where the state is too weak to defend the country, the recommendation is unilateral interventionism within the molds of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which is seen as much more effective than the 'bureaucratic and outdated' system of the United Nations.

The clear-eyed wisdom of the Roosevelt Corollary – which recognizes that if the United States didn't keep order in the Caribbean, the Germans or British would – gave way to the idealistic hopes of the UN Charter that we could keep all *together*. Those hopes crumbled to dust a long, long time ago. And now, a century later, an updated version of the Roosevelt Corollary seems to be reemerging as the international law of nations. (Frum and Perle, 2003: 120–1)

Following similar lines of argumentation to Wolfowitz, Frum and Perle, Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, who held executive positions in the National Security Council during the Clinton government, attribute a revolutionary meaning to Bush's foreign policy. For the authors, the international performance of the United States is oriented by two beliefs:

The first was that in a dangerous world, the best – if not the only – way to ensure America's security was to shed the constraints imposed by friends, allies, and

international institutions. Maximizing America's freedom to act was essential because the unique position of the United States made it the most likely target for any country or group hostile to the West. Americans could not count on others to protect them; countries inevitably ignored threats that did not involve them . . . The second belief was that an America unbound should use its strength to change the status quo in the world. (Daalder and Lindsay, 2003: 13)

Based on the recognition of the matchless superiority of its armed forces, the 'revolutionary' contribution of Bush was the will and decision to use national power, in spite of opposition from allies, to force the definition of priorities for the international agenda. However the president's bet brought unexpected results. He misperceived the limits that surround the American military power, facing greater difficulties in conquering and maintaining support for its interventionist policy in the Middle East: 'he overestimated what the unilateral exercise of its power could achieve. America was not omnipotent. To achieve most of its goals it still required the cooperation of others' (Frum and Perle, 2004: 188-9).

### **The European Contrast: A Different Alternative**

Since the Iraqi invasion in March 2003, more controversies have arisen between those who see interventionism as one more symptom of the hegemonic crisis and those who defend the role of the United States as an indispensable nation, the only one willing to adopt extreme measures related to challenges.

Among the first, there is a combination of economic and political arguments. Regarding the economy, observing the crisis has become clearer since the Bush administration, having in mind the weakening of growth that characterized the Clinton period, an increment in unemployment running parallel to the vast expansion of defense costs, whose budget was increased by 37 billion dollars in 2003 in relation to the previous year, reaching 355 billion and 400 million dollars, or almost 17 percent of the total national budget, from 2 trillion and 100 billion dollars (Montoya, 2003). The Congress approved an increase to 379.3 billion dollars to the Department of Defense budget for the 2004 fiscal year. According to Chalmers Johnson, '93 percent of budgetary allocations dedicated to international affairs were going to the military and only 7 percent to the State Department' (2004: 288).<sup>2</sup> However, there are also signs that express a tendency over many years: an increasing commercial deficit, which went from 100 billion dollars in 1990 to 450 billion dollars in 2000, requiring 1 billion dollars a day to cover it; the concentration of income, which for the richest 5 percent went from 15.5 percent in 1980 to 21.9 percent in 2000 and for the less rich 80 percent fell from 56.9 to 50.6 percent (Todd, 2003); energy dependence, given that the country only has 5 percent of the world population, 2 percent of the global petroleum resources and 11 percent of its world

production, but consumes almost 26 percent of the world supply (and for the next 20 years, an increase in its consumption is calculated to be around 6 million barrels daily) (Rifkin, 2002).

Among the political arguments, some European authors, especially from France, have started to question the world relevance that the United States assigns to itself. According to Emmanuel Todd, the economic factors listed above cause an increasing necessity for inflating threats, thus feeding international activism in the country. This would lead their government to take over a 'theatrical militarism' comprising three main characteristics:

- Never definitely solve a problem, so as to justify the indefinite military action of the 'unique superpower' on a global scale.
- Focus on micro-powers – Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Cuba etc . . . The only way to continue politically in the center of the world and 'face' minor actors . . .
- Develop new weapons that would supposedly guarantee 'first place' to the United States in an endless weapon-development race. (Todd, 2003: 32)

Todd believes in the untenability of the American Empire, which will disappear before 2050 for two basic reasons:

Its military and economic coercion power is insufficient to maintain the present level of exploitation of the planet; its ideological universalism is in decline and does not treat men and peoples in an equal way in order to guarantee peace and prosperity and exploits them. (Todd, 2003: 98)

Similarly to Todd, Alain Joxe criticizes the fragility of the premises in which the present American powers lies, characterizing it as a chaotic empire, as it assumes combat actions that focus on the symptoms and not the causes of conflicts which have spread worldwide, therefore building 'a system which only succeeds in regulating disorder through financial norms and military expeditions, without a permanent project in the conquered territories' (2003: 21). If this attitude continues to predominate in the United States foreign policy, the author foresees the emergence of a worldwide anti-democratic regime. Opposing this, he proposes a recuperation of the European Republican tradition, which he considers less narrow in the approach of conflicts, basing international relations on the respect for plurality, tolerance, non-intervention and the search for a better economic and social balance. In this tradition,

Tyranny is not considered non-human but as a way of an antidemocratic government; the social class struggle is not a crime but an ordinary state of developed societies that should be peaceful in democracy, but not 'disappear'. The income redistribution using a voluntary procedure of equitable sharing has been the ABC of political science since Aristotle, and not the delirious thought of a crazy subversive.

The European vision in relation to the Other, considered as political

opposition, is however essentially different from the American's, which build it as exclusion. (Joxe, 2003: 239–40)

Among the authors who question the political arguments of the hegemonic crisis of the United States and the idea of an 'essentially different' Europe is Robert Kagan, one of the co-founders, together with William Kristol, of the Project for the New American Century. He does not question the existence of diverging visions, especially 'in the extremely important question of power, efficiency of power, morality of power, willingness of power' (2003: 7).

Europe is deviating from power, or in other words, is going beyond power, in the direction of an isolated world full of laws, norms, negotiations and international cooperation. It is going into a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity, the concretization of Immanuel Kant's 'perpetual peace'. The United States, on the other hand, continues to wallow in history, exerting the power in a Hobbesian anarchy world, where laws and international policies are not reliable, the truth safe, defense and promotion of the liberal order still depends on the possession and use of military power. (Kagan, 2003: 7)

Despite the recognition of diversity of views and positions, the contrasts would not express the opposition between an essentially pacifist and democratic Europe and a United States having a natural inclination to ward the realistic exercise of power, with differentiated, but at the same time complementary capacities, for the use of force. According to Kagan, more than an option among principles, the present European attitude does not differ from that adopted by the United States in the 19th century, then militarily weak, its strategic calculus of power accumulation recommended a withdrawal of politics from the hegemonic disputes among the European powers, whose vision of the world reflected the peak of economic, military and colonial power. Nowadays, the positions are inverted, and the United States and Europe assume equivalent positions to their 'weight' in international relations. However, there is a paradox concerning the European position:

Its transition to post-history depended on the fact that the United States did not have such a transition. As it did not have the disposition or ability to protect its own paradise and prevent it from being invaded, spiritually as well as physically, by a world that still had not adopted the 'moral conscience' law, Europe became dependent on the American disposition for using its military power to hold and defeat those that, around the world, are still supporters of the power of politics. (Kagan, 2003: 75)

The armed expeditions which attack the symptoms and not the causes of crises, which Joxe associates with a 'Chaotic Empire', expose the unwillingness of Europe to assume a closer involvement, especially when the conflicts developed in its own territory, as happened in the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s.

According to Kagan, the positions adopted by both Europe and the United States will not go through substantial changes. Unless there is a military or economic catastrophe on a major scale, which undermines the continuity of North American power, 'it's reasonable to presume that we have just gone into a long period of American hegemony' (2003: 90).

Some signs tend to reinforce this evaluation, especially those referring to the maintenance costs of the present policy for the national economy, which would be difficult to overcome. Regarding foreign deficits, the financing of American spending would lend stability to the world economy, guaranteeing commercial *superávit*<sup>3</sup> for various countries and regions, as is shown in the data in Table 1.

Regarding military spending as a proportion of the GNP (Gross National Product), as Todd mentions, there was a considerable reduction, from over 7 percent at the end of the 1980s, to 5.2 percent in 1995 and to 3 percent in 1999 (Todd, 2003). At the peak of British hegemony between 1815 and 1870, military costs varied between 2 and 3 percent of the GNP (Kennedy, 1989).

As Gilberto Dupas (2003) highlights, the gap between the size of the economy of the United States and the other nuclear powers, like Russia, brings about lower relative costs to the maintenance of present politics.

Since the Soviet Empire was overthrown, Russia has had a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of only 330 billion dollars and spends 10% of it on military expenses. On the other hand, the United States has a GDP of 11 trillion dollars (over 30 times bigger) and can have the luxury of spending a little more than 3% of it yearly in order to have a military budget similar to the whole Russian GDP. (Dupas, 2003: 213)

For Chalmers Johnson, a critic of the George W. Bush foreign policy, the international performance of the United States gives the impression of adopting the thesis of the clash of civilizations, although in an opposed direction to the isolationism prescribed by Huntington, recreating a missionary Christian fundamentalism. In spite of negatively evaluating the economic costs of the military

**Table 1.**  
**USA Commercial Deficit with selected countries**

Country	USA Commercial Deficit (2003)
China	-123,960.6
Japan	-65,965.3
European Union	-94,262.1
Mexico	-40,616.2
Latin America (except Mexico)	-26,821.3
South Korea	-12,864.7
Israel	-5891.9
Russia	-6148.4

Based on the Trade Information Center, Country Information US Department of Commerce [<http://ese.export.gov/>].

domination of the world, using resources of the private economy and contradicting the spirit of free enterprise, Johnson does not assume a definitive position on the future: 'it must be recognized that any study of our empire is a work in progress. Although we may know the eventual outcome, it is not at all clear what come next' (Johnson, 2004: 310).

### **Hegemony or Domination?**

From our point of view, the radicalization of positions regarding the Bush government should not be associated with abandoning the hegemonic consensus because of the speed of a structural crisis which imposes open domination as the only alternative. What can be verified is an indication of policy hardening, as a preventive action against the instability factors associated with a transitory moment between the bipolar world and the configuration of a new order.

Among these factors, the following can be highlighted: the financial crises originating from the devaluation of the Mexican peso in December 1994, reaching South Korea, Russia, Brazil and Argentina afterwards; the terrorist attacks in 1998 on the Kenya and Tanzania embassies, which represent a qualitative jump in the Bush government with the 11 September attacks, and the world emergence of the movements against 'neoliberal globalization' beginning with the Seattle manifestations, during the World Trade Organization meeting in November 1999.

The view of polarization factors between countries and social sectors – at least for the short and middle terms – leads the United States government to choose explicit limits which demarcate the safety of the system, and initiate a wide campaign to decrease levels of uncertainty, fighting back the 'new barbarians' who are spread throughout the empire's territories.

The closest precedent to this foreign policy occurred during Ronald Reagan's administration when it faced a more delicate issue involving several aspects: regarding the economic aspect, the second shock of petroleum, the world recession and the loss of positions of the country in relation to Japan and West Germany; regarding politics, the consequences of the withdrawal from Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, in addition to the expansion of the Soviet Union and the revolutions in Iran and Nicaragua.

At that time, unilateralism in international relations, with the diplomacy of a strong dollar and the fight against the 'evil empire', was the option of a team who came from conservative circles, whose influence can be felt in Bush administrations (father and son).<sup>4</sup> The conviction of these modern followers of the 'big stick' is that the Soviet withdrawal and the recovery of US hegemony were caused fundamentally by the success of policies adopted in the 1980s that encouraged favoritism for the benefit of deflagration of a new crusade.

Unlike that setting, new enemies to the system are not seen on the horizon. The political organizations which defend anti-capitalistic programs do

not count on the support of nuclear powers which have hegemonic international ambitions. From the United States foreign policies' point of view, the anti-western fundamentalisms, the social movements and the non-governmental organizations which criticize globalization, basically question its misalignments. Rebellion would express the resentment with the exclusion, unlike the communist left, which highlighted the criticism extracting and appropriating the surplus value, reaching the core of capitalism.

Expanding access and inclusion becomes one of the strategic challenges of the order proclaimed by the United States. However, while relevant gains in this field are not seen, the option for hardening policy attempts to make the structural limits of the possible change more explicit, making the market economy and liberal democracy non-negotiable bases of a way of life to be preserved and expanded. Having this strategic perspective as a central reference, the United States government is seeking the political support of the 'winners' in the new order, making it clear that if it is war time, the defense of the conquered hierarchies is prior to the situational and located losses of freedom and material well-being. This requires strong political support against the increasing activism of the 'losers', who would be contaminated by irrationality with strong components of resentment and destruction. From the moment when a favorable epilogue is feasible in fighting the new enemies, it will be possible to re-establish the normality, deactivating the State of Exception instruments. Meanwhile, the 'hawks' will look after the systemic governance, taking over the political costs of unilateralism.

From our point of view, the current position of the United States in international relations has an essentially structural dimension. The differences between Republican 'unilateralism' and Democrat 'multilateralism', hard and soft power defenders, cosmopolitan, imperial or national approaches are much more related to the means than to the ends of the foreign policy. In this context, we do not see threats to the continuing of the world order whose defense stimulates the spirit of the Bush Doctrine.

Throughout its history, and according to the challenges of each age and each country, capitalism has lived together with monarchical regimes, representative democracy, Nazi-fascist totalitarianisms, military dictatorships and populist nationalisms. Why would this time be different? Similar to the transition from the 19th century to the 20th century, hegemony of current imperialism searches for support from national audiences and by governments of the countries of advanced and backward capitalism, building a power which is supposed to be incontestable in terms of economic, military, political and cultural aspects.

## NOTES

1. Declaration of Principles of the Project, presented in 1997, signed by Elliott Abrams, Gary Bauer, William J. Bennett, Jeb Bush, Dick Cheney, Eliot A. Cohen, Midge Decter, Paula Dobriansky, Steve Forbes, Aaron Friedberg, Francis Fukuyama, Frank Gaffney, Fred C. Ikle, Donald Kagan, Zalmay Khalilzad, I. Lewis Libby, Norman Podhoretz, Dan Quayle, Peter W. Rodman, Stephen P. Rosen, Henry S. Rowen, Donald Rumsfeld, Vin Weber, George Weigel, and Paul Wolfowitz, [<http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm>]
2. For the 2006 fiscal year, President Bush proposed an increase of 4.8 percent in the expenses with defense, excluding the expenditures in Iraq and Afghanistan (Maisonave, 2005: B2).
3. Surplus.
4. Elliot Abrams, sub-secretary of the inter-American relations of the State Department in Reagan's administration, is the present Senior Director for Democracy, Human Rights and International Operations of the National Security Council. The vice-president, Dick Cheney, was George Bush's Defense secretary. The former State secretary, Colin Powell, was head of the General Staff in the Army and the former adjunct-secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, was the sub-secretary of Defense.

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- [[http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/t05092002\\_t0429la.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/t05092002_t0429la.html)], accessed 29 April 2002.
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