

This issue of the journal is devoted to a two-part study of American foreign policy by Perry Anderson. 'Imperium' examines the objectives and outcomes of US world power; 'Consilium', the thinking of its policy elite. NLR has run three special numbers before: Tom Nairn on Europe in 1972, Anthony Barnett on the Falklands War in 1982, and Robert Brenner on the dynamics of manufacturing over-capacity which underlie hyper-leveraged financialization, in 1998.* Concerned with leading questions of world politics, Anderson's contribution can be read as complementary to Brenner's on the global economy. While 'Imperium' pays tribute to a remarkable tradition of non-conformist foreign-policy analysis, by minds across the political spectrum—Spykman, Kolko, Schurmann, Williams, McCormick, Tucker, Johnson, Bacevich, Layne and more—'Consilium' engages with current mainstream literature on America's role in the world and the assumptions of its practitioners. Behind these lie the distinctive repertoire of an American nationalism dating back to Independence, and its evolution into operative ideologies of international leadership. Today, assessments of US power by its own grand strategists are prone to subjectivist mood swings, with little historical sense of the fit or frictions between the twin functions of America's global hegemony: at once general—guarantor of the economic order of capital as a whole; and particular—promoter within that order of the interests of US firms and banks, or demands of domestic lobbies. In what follows, the tensions between these are traced from the closing stages of the Second World War through the Cold War to the War on Terror, across a half-century in which the build-out of planetary structures for warfare and surveillance in the battle against the USSR would not be retracted but extended after Soviet defeat—even as the US economy became ever more reliant on the expansion of credit, and its rivals increasingly interdependent on it. The outcomes of that nexus are still unfolding. Politically, opposition to the American empire requires no under-estimation of its life-span; its fate remains to be settled.

* Tom Nairn, 'The Left Against Europe?', NLR 1/75, Sept–Oct 1972; Anthony Barnett, 'Iron Britannia', NLR 1/134, July–Aug 1982; Robert Brenner, 'The Economics of Global Turbulence', NLR 1/229, May–June 1998.

CONSILIUM

IN THE AMERICAN intellectual landscape, the literature of grand strategy forms a domain of its own, distinct from diplomatic history or political science, though it may occasionally draw on these. Its sources lie in the country's security elite, which extends across the bureaucracy and the academy to foundations, think-tanks and the media. In this milieu, with its emplacements in the Council on Foreign Relations, the Kennedy School in Harvard, the Woodrow Wilson Center in Princeton, the Nitze School at Johns Hopkins, the Naval War College, Georgetown University, the Brookings and Carnegie Foundations, the Departments of State and of Defense, not to speak of the National Security Council and the CIA, positions are readily interchangeable, individuals moving seamlessly back and forth between university chairs or think-tanks and government offices, in general regardless of the party in control of the Administration.

This amphibious environment sets output on foreign policy apart from the scholarship of domestic politics, more tightly confined within the bounds of a professional discipline and peer-review machinery, where it speaks mainly to itself. The requirements of proficiency in the discourse of foreign policy are not the same, because of a two-fold difference of audience: office-holders on the one hand, an educated public on the other. This body of writing is constitutively advisory, in a sense stretching back to the Renaissance—counsels to the Prince. Rulers tolerate no pedants: what advice they receive should be crisp and uncluttered. In contemporary America, they have a relay below them which values an accessible *éclat* for reasons of its own. Think-tanks, of central importance in this world, dispense their fellows from teaching; in exchange, they expect a certain public impact—columns, op-eds, talk-shows, best-sellers—from them: not on the population as a whole, but among the small, well-off minority that takes an interest in such matters. The effect of this dual calling is to produce a literature that is less scholarly, but freer and more imaginative—less costive—than its domestic counterpart.

The contrast is also rooted in their fields of operation. Domestic politics is of far greater interest, to many more Americans, than diplomacy. But the political system at home is subject only to slow changes over time, amid repeated institutional deadlock of one kind or another. It is a scene of much frustration, rare excitement. The American imperial system, by contrast, is a theatre of continual drama—coups, crises, insurgencies, wars, emergencies of every kind; and there, short of treaties which have to pass the legislature, no decision is ever deadlocked. The executive can do as it pleases, so long as the masses—a rare event: eventually Korea or Vietnam; marginally Iraq—are not startled awake by some unpopular setback.¹ In this enormous zone of potential action, the advisory imagination can roam—run riot, even—with a liberty impossible at home. Whatever the results, naturally various, there is no mistaking the greater intellectual energy that foreign policy attracts in the thought-world of the Beltway and its penumbra.

¹ In the words of a representative insider: 'In the United States, as in other countries, foreign policy is the preoccupation of only a small part of the population. But carrying out any American foreign policy requires the support of the wider public. Whereas for the foreign-policy elite, the need for American leadership in the world is a matter of settled conviction, in the general public the commitment to global leadership is weaker. This is not surprising. That commitment depends on a view of its effects on the rest of the world and the likely consequences of its absence. These are views for which most Americans, like most people in most countries, lack the relevant information because they are not ordinarily interested enough to gather it. The politics of American foreign policy thus resembles a firm in which the management—the foreign-policy elite—has to persuade the shareholders—the public—to authorize expenditures': Michael Mandelbaum, 'The Inadequacy of American Power', *Foreign Affairs*, Sept–Oct 2002, p. 67. It is enough to ask how many firms consult shareholders over their expenditures—in this case, of course, military—to see the pertinence of the analogy.

I. NATIVE TRADITIONS

On the threshold of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, there appeared a confident portmanteau of the native resources that for two centuries ensured that American foreign policy had 'won all the prizes'. Walter Russell Mead's *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (2001) can be taken as a base-line for the subsequent literature. Continental European traditions of geopolitical realism, Mead argued, had always been alien to the United States.² Morality and economics, not geopolitics, were the essential guidelines of the nation's role in the world. These did not preclude the use of force for right ends—in twentieth-century warfare, America had been more disproportionately destructive of its enemies than Nazi Germany.³ But the policies determining these ends were the product of a unique democratic synthesis: Hamiltonian pursuit of commercial advantage for American enterprise abroad; Wilsonian duty to extend the values of liberty across the world; Jeffersonian concern to preserve the virtues of the republic from foreign temptations; and Jacksonian valour in any challenge to the honour or security of the country. If the first two were elite creeds, and the third an inclination among intellectuals, the fourth was the folk ethos of the majority of the American people. But out of the competition between these—the outlook of merchants, of missionaries, of constitutional lawyers and of frontiersmen—had emerged, as in the invisible hand of the market, the best of all foreign policies.⁴ Combining hard and soft power in ways at once flexible, pragmatic and

² Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, New York 2001, pp. 34–9 ff. Rejection of Kissinger's brand of realism as un-American in *Special Providence* was no bar to Mead's appointment as Kissinger Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in the wake of its success, before taking a chair at Bard.

³ 'In the last five months of World War II, American bombing raids killed more than 900,000 Japanese civilians, not counting the casualties from the atomic strikes against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This is more than twice the number of combat deaths (441,513) that the United States has suffered in all its foreign wars combined', while the ratio of civilian to combat deaths in the American wars in Korea and Vietnam was higher even than in the German invasion of Russia. Naturally, Mead assures his readers, no moral parallel is implied: *Special Providence*, pp. 218–9.

⁴ Mead, *Special Providence*, pp. 95–6, 311–2.

idealistic, America's conduct of world affairs derived from the complementary diversity of its inspirations a homeostatic stability and wisdom.

Descriptively, the tally of native traditions laid out in this construction is often vivid and ingenious, assorted with many acute observations, however roseate the retrospect in which they issue. Analytically, however, it rests on the *non sequitur* of an equivalence between them, as so many contributors to a common upshot. A glance at the personifications offered of each undoes any such idea. The long list of Hamiltonian statesmen at the helm of the State Department or ensconced in the White House—Clay, Webster, Hay, Lodge, TR, Hull, Acheson, the first Bush are mentioned—can find a Wilsonian counterpart only by appealing to the regularity of mixtures since the Second World War—FDR, Truman, Kennedy and the rest; while of Jeffersonian rulers or chancellors there are virtually none—even the eponym himself scarcely exemplifying abstinence from external ambition and aggrandisement,⁵ leaving as illustration only a forlorn train of isolates and outsiders, in a declension down to Borah, Lippman, Fulbright. As for Jacksonians, aside from a subsequent string of undistinguished military veterans in the nineteenth century, Polk and the second Bush could be counted among their number, but most of the recent instances cited in *Special Providence*—Patton, MacArthur, McCain; Wallace might be added—were burst bullfrogs. Popular support for American wars, Mead correctly notes, requires galvanization of Jacksonian truculence in the social depths of the country. But the foreign policy that determines them is set elsewhere. The reality is that of the four traditions, only two have had consistent weight since the Spanish-American conflict; the others furnish little more than sporadic supplies of cassandrism and cannon-fodder.

In that sense, the more conventional dichotomy with which Kissinger—identified by Mead as the practitioner of a European-style *Realpolitik* with no roots in America—opened his treatise *Diplomacy* some years earlier, can be taken as read. In Kissinger's version, the two legacies that matter are lines that descend respectively from Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson: the first, a realist resolve to maintain a balance of power in the world; the second, an idealist commitment to put an end to arbitrary

⁵ For the actual record of the architect of Montebello, see Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson*, New York 1990.

powers everywhere. Though discredited at the time, Wilson's ideas had in the long run prevailed over Roosevelt's. American foreign policy would come to conjugate the two, but the Wilsonian strain would be dominant. 'A universal grouping of largely democratic nations would act as the "trustee" of peace and replace the old balance-of-power and alliance systems. Such exalted sentiments had never before been put forward by any nation, let alone implemented. Nevertheless, in the hands of American idealism they were turned into the common currency of national thinking of foreign policy', Kissinger declared. Nixon himself had hung a portrait of the Man of Peace as inspiration to him in the Oval Office: 'In all this time, Wilson's principles have remained the bedrock of American foreign-policy thinking.'⁶

II

The authorship of the dictum is enough to indicate the need to invert it. Since the Second World War, the ideology of American foreign policy has always been predominantly Wilsonian in register—'making the world safe for democracy' segueing into a 'collective security' that would in due course become the outer buckler of 'national security'. In substance, its reality has been unswervingly Hamiltonian—the pursuit of American supremacy, in a world made safe for capital.⁷ But with rare exceptions like Kissinger, the ideology has been a credulous rather than a cynical adornment of the exercise of American power, whose holders—Bush and Obama are only the latest—have always believed that there is no conflict between American values and American interests. That US paramountcy is at once a national prize and a universal good is taken for granted by policy-makers and their counsellors, across the party-political

⁶ Once 'the post-war world became largely America's creation', the US would 'play the role Wilson had envisioned for it—as a beacon to follow, and a hope to attain': Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York 1994, pp. 52, 55.

⁷ As Wilson himself intimated in 1923. 'The world has been made safe for democracy', he wrote. 'But democracy has not yet made the world safe against irrational revolution. That supreme task, which is nothing less than the salvation of civilization, now faces democracy, insistent, imperative. There is no escaping it, unless everything we have built up is presently to fall in ruin about us; and the United States, as the greatest of democracies, must undertake it'. For these reflections, see 'The Road Away from Revolution', c. 8 April 1923, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 68, Princeton 1993, p. 323.

board. Terminologically, in this universe, ‘primacy’ is still preferable to empire, but in its more theoretical reaches, ‘hegemony’ is now acceptable to virtually all. The contemporary editors of *To Lead the World*, a symposium of eminences from every quarter, remark that all of them agree ‘the United States should be a leader in the international system’, accept Clinton’s description of it as ‘the indispensable nation’, and concur that the country should retain its military predominance: ‘none of the contributors proposes to reduce military spending significantly or wants to allow US superiority to erode’.⁸

That it should even be necessary to say so, marks the period since 2001 as a new phase in the discourse, if not the practice, of empire. Here the vicissitudes of the last dozen years—the *attentats* of 2001, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the financial crisis of 2008, the continuing war in Afghanistan—have generated an all but universal problematic. Is American power in global decline? If so, what are the reasons? What are the remedies? Common *leitmotifs* run through many of the answers. Few fail to include a list of the domestic reforms needed to restore the competitive superiority of American economy and society. All calculate the risks of a renewal of Great Power rivalry—China figuring most prominently, but not exclusively—that could endanger American primacy, and contemplate the dangers of terrorism in the Middle East, threatening American security. The fortunes of capitalism and the future of democracy are rarely out of mind. Each construction differs in some significant ways from the next, offering a spectrum of variations that can be taken as a proxy for the current repertoire—partly ongoing, partly prospective—of US grand strategy in the new century. The core of the community producing these is composed of thinkers whose careers have moved across appointments in government, universities and foundations. In this milieu, unlike that of diplomatic historians, direct

⁸ Melvyn Leffler and Jeffrey Legro, eds, *To Lead the World: American Strategy after the Bush Doctrine*, New York 2008, pp. 250–2. The contributors include Francis Fukuyama, Charles Maier, John Ikenberry, James Kurth, David Kennedy, Barry Eichengreen, Robert Kagan, Niall Ferguson and Samantha Power, Obama’s Ambassador to the UN. Leffler has himself elsewhere explained that if ‘the community that came into existence after the Second World War’ is to survive, ‘the hegemonic role of the United States must be relegitimized’, or—as Wilson put it—‘peace must be secured by the organized moral force of mankind’. Leffler, ‘9/11 and The Past and Future of American Foreign Policy’, *International Affairs*, October 2003, pp. 1062–3.

dispute or polemical engagement are rare, not only because of the extent of common assumptions, but also because writing is often shaped with an eye to official preferment, where intellectual pugilism is not favoured, though divergences of outlook are still plain enough. Individual quirks ensure that no selection of strategists will be fully representative. But a number of the most conspicuous contributions are readily identified.⁹

⁹ Excluded in what follows are figures whose careers have only been within the media or the academy. Prominent among the former are the journalists Fareed Zakaria of *Newsweek* and Peter Beinart of *Time*, authors respectively of *The Post-American World* (2008) and *The Icarus Syndrome* (2010). For the second, see Anders Stephanson, 'The Toughness Crew', *NLR* 82, July–Aug 2013. In the academy, the field of international relations or 'security studies' includes a literature as dedicated to the technicalities of game theory and rational choice as any domestic political science, alembications precluding a wider audience, but also theorists of distinction whose independence of mind has saved them from temptations of office. John Mearsheimer of Chicago is an outstanding example, for whose *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001), see Peter Gowan's essay, 'A Calculus of Power', *NLR* 16, July–Aug 2002; but there are not a few others. Of leading in-and-outers passed over below, Joseph Nye—Harvard Kennedy School; Under-Secretary of State in the Carter Administration and Chairman of the NSC under Clinton; author of *Bound to Lead* (1990) and *The Paradox of American Power* (2002)—is insufficiently original, with little more than the banalities of soft power to his name, to warrant consideration. Philip Bobbitt—currently Director of the National Security Center at Columbia; service on the CIA under Carter, NSC under Clinton and for the State Department under the second Bush; author of *The Shield of Achilles* (2003) and *Terror and Consent* (2008)—is far from banal, but has been discussed in depth here by Gopal Balakrishnan, 'Algorithms of War', *NLR* 23, Sept–Oct 2003.

2. CRUSADERS

They can start with the protean figure of Mead himself. His first work *Mortal Splendor*, published in 1987 at the height of the Iran–Contra debacle, chronicled the failures in turn of Nixon, of Carter and of Reagan to restore the American empire—bluntly described as such—to its lustre. Criticizing the archaism, involution and corruption of the Constitution, Mead lamented falling popular living standards and escalating budgetary deficits, ending with a call to Democrats to put an end to a decaying ‘bureaucratic and oligarchic order’ with the creation of a ‘fourth republic’, recasting the New Deal with a more populist and radical drive, and projecting it outwards as a programme for the world at large.¹⁰ Fourteen years later, his stand-point had somersaulted. A virtual pallbearer of empire in *Mortal Splendor*, by the time of *Special Providence* he had become its trumpeter, though the term itself now disappeared, the US featuring for the most part simply as ‘the central power in a worldwide system of finance, communications and trade’, and ‘gyroscope of world order’. International hegemony, it was true, the nation did enjoy. But Americans were insufficiently reflective of its meanings and purposes, about which more debate between their national traditions of foreign policy was now needed. His own inclinations, Mead explained, were Jeffersonian.¹¹

They did not last long. Mead’s response to the attacks of 2001, a few months after the appearance of *Special Providence*, set its taxonomy to work with a difference. *Power, Terror, Peace and War* (2004) set out a robust programme to meet the challenges now confronting the ‘American project’ of domestic security and a peaceful world, whose failure would be a disaster for humanity. Fortunately, the US continued to combine the three forms of power that had hitherto assured its hegemony: ‘sharp’—the military force to prevent the Middle East becoming a ‘theocratic terror camp’; ‘sticky’—the economic interdependence that tied China to America through trade and debt; and ‘sweet’—the cultural attractions of American popular movies and music, universities, feminism, multi-nationals, immigration, charities. But the socio-economic

¹⁰ ‘The reforms must go far beyond those of the Roosevelt period’, Mead insisted. ‘The next wave will have a more socialist and less liberal coloration than the first one’: *Mortal Splendor: The American Empire in Transition*, New York 1987, pp. 336–8.

¹¹ Mead, *Special Providence*, pp. 323–4, 333–4.

terrain on which these should now be deployed had shifted. After the Second World War, Fordism had provided a firm ground for US ascendancy, combining mass production and mass consumption in a way of life that became the envy of the world. With the end of the Cold War, the American example appeared to promise a future in which free markets and free government could henceforward spread everywhere, under a protective canopy of US might.¹²

But that was to forget that capitalism is a dynamic system, again and again destroying what it has created, to give birth to new forms of itself. The bureaucratized, full employment, manufacturing economy of Fordism was now a thing of the past in America, as elsewhere. What had replaced it was a 'millennial capitalism' of more free-wheeling competition and individual risk-taking, corporate down-sizing and hi-tech venturing, shorn of the props and protections of an earlier epoch: a force feared by all those—governments, elites or masses—who had benefited from Fordism and still clung to its ways. Restless and disruptive, it was the arrival of this millennial capitalism that underlay the revolution in American foreign policy in the new century. Its champions were now at the helm, remaking Hamiltonian conceptions of business, reviving Wilsonian values of liberty, and updating a Jacksonian bent for pre-emptive action.¹³ The Bush Administration might have offered too thin a version of the rich case for attacking Iraq, since weapons of mass destruction were less important than a blow to regional fascism and the prospect of the first Arab democracy in Baghdad. But this was no time for Jeffersonian misgivings. Strategically, the Republican Administration had made most of the right choices. If its execution of them had been somewhat choppy, TR and Wilson had on occasion stumbled at the start of their revolutions too. With US troops on the Tigris, the correct strategy for dealing with Arab fascists and terrorists, indeed all other enemies of freedom, was moving ahead: 'forward containment', complete where necessary with preventive strikes at the adversary.

¹² Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace and War*, New York, 2004, pp. 26–55.

¹³ Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace and War*, pp. 73–103. By this time, Kissinger himself—another supporter of the invasion of Iraq—had adopted Mead's taxonomy for the purposes of criticizing American conduct of the Cold War prior to the Nixon Administration and his own assumption of office, as an overly rigid blend of Wilsonism and Jacksonism, forgetful of Hamiltonian principles. See *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?*, New York 2002, pp. 245–56, a volume whose intellectual quality rarely rises much above the level of its title.

Three years later, *God and Gold: Britain, America and the Making of the Modern World* encased these themes in a vaster world-historical theodicy. Behind the rise of the United States to global hegemony lay the prior ascendancy of Britain, in a relation not of mere sequence but organic connexion, that across five hundred years had given the Anglo-American powers a succession of unbroken victories over illiberal enemies—Habsburg Spain, Bourbon and Napoleonic France, Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, Soviet Russia. The secret of this continuous triumph lay in a culture uniquely favourable to the titanic forces of capitalism, crossing Anglican religion and its offshoots with the Enlightenments of Newton and Smith, Madison and Darwin—a form of Christianity reconciling reason, revelation and tradition, allied to a ‘golden meme’ of secular conceptions of order arising out of the free play of natural forces, and their evolution. In due course, out of the combination of an Abrahamic faith committed to change—not a static, but a dynamic religion in the sense described by Bergson—and the explosion of human potential released by capitalism, came the Whig narrative of overarching historical progress.

Such was the cultural environment that nurtured the monumental creativity of Anglo-American finance, first in London and then New York, the core of capitalist efficiency as a system of rational allocation of resources, with its ingenuity in developing ever-new devices in banking, trading, stock-jobbing, insurance, all the way to the credit cards and mortgage-backed securities of contemporary prosperity. The power of mass consumption, in turn, harnessed by flexible markets to the economic interests of the talented—‘perhaps the most revolutionary discovery in human history since the taming of fire’—generated the cascade of inventions in which Britain and America took the lead: white goods, railways, department stores, automobiles, telephones, popular culture at large. It was little wonder these two countries proved invincible on the world stage.

But the very success of Anglo-America bred its own illusions—a persistent belief that the rest of the world must of its own accord follow, if not sooner then later, the path to liberty, diversity and prosperity where it had led the way. Capitalism, however, could emerge smoothly and gradually into the world only within the privilege of its Anglican–Whig setting. Everywhere else, its arrival was harsher—more sudden and disruptive

of old ways; typically infected, too, with resentment at the prowess of the first-comers, and the rough justice others had reason to feel these meted out to them—a ruthlessness draped with many a pious expression of regret or rectitude, in the spirit of the Walrus and the Carpenter. That kind of resentment had been true of successive continental powers in the Europe of the past, and remained widespread in the extra-European world today, from the Russian bear licking its wounds to the Chinese dragon puffing its envious fire, not to speak of assorted Arab scorpions in the Middle East.

After the end of the Cold War, dangerous forces were still afoot. In confronting them, the United States should show tact where other cultures were concerned, whose sensibilities required the finesse of a ‘diplomacy of civilizations’. But it had no reason for doubt or despondency. Command of the seas remained the key to global power, and there US supremacy remained unchallenged: the maritime system that had assured Anglo-American triumph over every foe, from the time of Elizabeth I and Philip II onwards, held as firmly as ever. Europe, united and free, was an ally; Russia, much weakened; China could be balanced by Japan and India. In the Middle East, Islam as a faith belonged to the conversation of the world, in which all peoples and cultures were entitled to their collective recognition, even as the ghost dancers of Arab terror were crushed. The *Pax Americana* would persist, for it was wrong to think that all empires must inevitably decline or disappear. Rather, as the example of China showed, they may wax and wane over millennia.

By this time, the invasion of Iraq had ‘proved to be an unnecessary and poorly planned war’, after all. But US engagement in the Middle East would have to deepen, and Mead looked forward to the arrival of centrist Democrats for a course correction. Imbued with the tragic sense of history and American responsibility bequeathed by Niebuhr, and sustained by the awakening of a new Evangelical moderation, the nation could recover the dynamism of that ‘deep and apparently in-built human belief that through change we encounter the transcendent and the divine’. Capitalism was taking us into a future of accelerating change, and there lay the country’s opportunity. For the American project was not simply to bring personal freedom and material abundance for all. It had a higher meaning. In leading the world on a ‘voyage of exploration into unknown waters’, that is ‘both our destiny and duty’, its maritime order would be

sailing towards an as yet unimagined horizon: there, where ‘the end of history is the peace of God’.¹⁴

The extravagance of this mystico-commercial construction might seem, on the face of it, to remove its author from mainstream discourse on foreign policy, and it is true that unlike most of his peers, Mead has never worked in government. But if he nevertheless remains central as a mind within the field, that is due not so much to the brutal energy of his style and restless ingenuity of his imagination, but to the indivisible fashion in which he has embodied in extreme form two opposite strains of American nationalism, each usually expressed more temperately: the economic and political realism of the tradition represented by the first Roosevelt, and the preceptorial and religious moralism consecrated by Wilson. Drumming out the blunt verities of capitalism, without flinching at—even rubbing in—the misdeeds of Anglo-American expansion, on the one hand; sublimating liberal democracy and higher productivity into a *parousia* of the Lord, on the other. The flamboyance of the combination has not meant marginalization. As he had foreseen, a Democrat was soon in the White House again, intoning the wisdom of Niebuhr, as Mead had wished, in a speech to the Nobel Committee he could have scripted. When Francis Fukuyama broke with the journal that had made him famous, *The National Interest*, on the grounds that it was tilting too far towards Nixonian *Realpolitik*, forgetting the salve of Wilsonian idealism that ought to be its complement, it was Mead who joined him in creating a new forum, *The American Interest*, to restore the balance of a true Liberal Realism.¹⁵

¹⁴ Mead, *God and Gold: Britain, America and the Making of the Modern World*, New York 2007, pp. 378, 387–402, 409, 411, 412.

¹⁵ After coming to the conclusion that most of his fellow neo-conservatives had been too warmly Wilsonian in their enthusiasm for bringing democracy to Iraq, Fukuyama then decided that others were becoming too coldly Kissingerian in a calculus of power detached from the values of democracy. Getting the ideological temperature right is no easy task, but on it the good health of America’s relations with the world depends. Having previously written about the work Fukuyama published at the time, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power and the Neoconservative Legacy* (2006), I have not included this in the literature considered here, though it is an eminent example of it: see, for my assessment, *The Nation*, 24 April 2006. Fukuyama and Mead keep up a running commentary on questions of the hour, national and international, in *The American Interest*, which bills itself as having broader concerns—notably in ‘religion, identity, ethnicity and demographics’—than *The National Interest*, under a former editor of the latter.

II

More typical of the field than this ecstatic hybrid are thinkers who belong without ambiguity to a particular tradition within the external repertory of the American state. There, as noted, the dominant has since the mid-forties always been Wilsonian—never more so than under the last three presidencies, all of which have proclaimed their devotion to the goals of the Peacemaker more vocally than any of their predecessors. The leading theorists within this camp, Michael Mandelbaum and John Ikenberry, each with a spell in the State Department, offer alternative versions of this outlook, substantially overlapping in intellectual framework, if diverging at significant points in political upshot.¹⁶ Mandelbaum is the more prominent and prolific, producing five widely applauded books in less than a decade, beginning with a trio whose titles speak for themselves: *The Ideas that Conquered the World* (2002), *The Case for Goliath* (2005) and *Democracy's Good Name* (2007).

For Mandelbaum, the story of the twentieth century was ‘a Whig history with a vengeance’: the triumph of the Wilsonian triad of peace, democracy and free markets. These were the ideas that finished off the Soviet Union, bringing the Cold War to a victorious end as its rulers succumbed to their attractive force. In part this was an outcome comparable to natural selection, eliminating the economically unfit. But it was also an effect of the moral revelation wrought by a superior creed, comparable to the religious conversion that in late Antiquity transformed pagans into Christians—Gorbachev, even Deng Xiaoping, had become latter-day Constantines. The result could be seen after the outrage of 2001. Every significant government in the world declared its solidarity with America, for all ‘supported the market-dominated world order that had come under attack and of which the United States served as the linchpin’, to which there was no viable alternative. To be sure, the full Wilsonian triad was not yet universally entrenched. The free market was now the most widely accepted idea in world history. But peace and democracy were not secure to quite the same extent. The foreign policies of Moscow and Beijing were less than completely pacific, their

¹⁶ Mandelbaum worked under Eagleburger and Shultz in the first Reagan Administration; Ikenberry under Baker in the Bush Senior Administration. Characteristically of such ‘in-and-outers’, partisan affiliations were not involved, the personal links of both men being Democrat rather than Republican.

economies were insufficiently marketized, their political systems only incipiently democratic. The highest objective of the West must now be to transform and incorporate Russia and China fully into the liberal world order, as the earlier illiberal powers of Germany and Japan were made over from challengers into pillars of the system, after the War.

In that task, leadership fell to one nation, because it is more than a nation. The United States was not simply a benign Goliath among states, the sun around whom the solar system turns. It was ‘the World’s Government’, for it alone provided the services of international security and economic stability to humanity, its role accepted because of the twenty-first century consensus around the Wilsonian triad. American contributions to the maintenance of peace and the spread of free markets were generally acknowledged. But the importance of the United States in the diffusion of democracy was scarcely less. Historically, the ideas of liberty and of popular sovereignty—how to govern, and who governs—were analytically and chronologically distinct. The former predated the latter, which arrived only with the French Revolution, but then spread much more rapidly, often at the expense of liberty. Democracy, when it came, would be the improbable fusion of the two. Its rise in the twentieth century was due in good part to the dynamism of free markets in generating social prosperity and civil society. But it also required the magnetic attraction of the power and wealth of the two great Anglophone democracies, Great Britain and—now overwhelmingly—the United States. Without their supremacy, the best form of rule would never have taken root so widely. It was they who made it ‘the leading brand’ that so many others would want to acquire.

In this construction, Wilsonian devotion presents an apotheosis of the United States in some ways more pristine even than the syncretic version in Mead, with its jaunty allowance of a dark side to the history of American expansionism. Not that the World’s Government was infallible. Mandelbaum, who had counselled Clinton in his campaign for the presidency, had a disagreeable surprise when he was elected: the new National Security Adviser to the White House was Anthony Lake, rather than himself. Three years later, taking direct aim at Lake, he published a withering critique of the international performance of the Clinton regime, ‘Foreign Policy as Social Work’, dismissing its interventions in Haiti and Bosnia as futile attempts to play Mother Teresa abroad, and attacking its expansion

of NATO to the east as a foolish provocation of Russia, jeopardizing its integration into a consensual ecumene after the Cold War.¹⁷

Nor, as time went on, was all well at home. A decade into the new century, *The Frugal Superpower* (2010) warned of widening inequality and escalating welfare entitlements amid continuing fiscal improvidence—Medicare potentially worse than Social Security, Keynesian deficits compounded by Laffer-esque tax-cuts—and the need for the country to adjust its overseas ends to its domestic means. *That Used to Be Us* (2011), co-authored with Thomas Friedman, extended the bill of anxieties. America's secondary education was in crisis; its infrastructure was collapsing; it was spending too little on R&D; it had no coherent energy policy; its welcome to immigrants had become grudging. Many individuals offered inspiring examples of altruism and enterprise, but the nation needed to pull itself collectively together with a set of public-private partnerships to regain the economic success and social harmony of old. For that to be possible, shock therapy was needed to shake up partisan deadlock in the political system—a third-party presidential candidate upholding the banner of a 'radical centrism'.

The urgency of such reforms spells no disaffection with America or retraction of its guardian role in the world. 'We, the authors of this book, don't want simply to restore American solvency. We want to maintain American greatness. We're not green-eyeshade guys. We're Fourth of July guys', they explain, in Friedman's inimitable tones.¹⁸ What follows from the tonics they propose? Mandelbaum's cool view of Clinton precluded conventional contrasts with Bush. In substance the foreign policy of the two had been much the same. Humanitarian intervention and preventive war were twins, not opposites. The occupation of Iraq, hailed in an afterword to *Ideas That Conquered the World* as a mission to bring the Wilsonian triad—'the establishment, where they

¹⁷ 'Foreign Policy as Social Work', *Foreign Affairs*, Jan–Feb 1996; followed by *The Dawn of Peace in Europe*, New York 1996, pp. 61–3: 'NATO expansion is, in the eyes of Russians in the 1990s, what the war guilt clause was for Germans in the 1930s: it reneges on the terms on which they believe the conflict in the West ended. It is a betrayal of the understanding they thought they had with their former enemies', which could 'produce the worst nightmare of the post-Cold War era: Weimar Russia'.

¹⁸ Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum, *That Used To Be Us: What Went Wrong with America—and How It Can Come Back*, New York 2011, p. 10.

had never previously existed, of peace, democracy and free markets'—to the Middle East, had four years later shrunk in *Democracy's Good Name* to a quest for peace—depriving the regime in Baghdad of weapons of mass destruction—rather than democracy. By the time of *The Frugal Superpower*, it had 'nothing to do with democracy', and stood condemned as a bungled operation.¹⁹ Still, though the immediate costs of Bush's invasion of Iraq were higher, Clinton's expansion of NATO was a much more lasting and graver blunder: not attempting, if failing, to solve a real problem, but creating a problem where none had otherwise existed. The US should eschew military attempts at nation-building, and seek international cooperation for its endeavours wherever possible. But major allies were not always reliable; if the West was faltering in Afghanistan, it was due to underperformance by a fragmented Europe, rather than to an overbearing, unilateral America. In the Middle East, war might still have to be waged against Iran. There closer cooperation was required with 'the only democratic and reliably pro-American country' in the region, one with 'a legitimate government, a cohesive society, and formidable military forces: the state of Israel'.²⁰

III

Mandelbaum's writing is the most strident version of a Wilsonian creed since the end of the Cold War, but in two respects it is not the purest. Of its nature, this is the tradition with the highest quotient of edulcoration—the most unequivocally apologetic—in the canon of American foreign policy, and by the same token, as the closest to ideology *tout court*, the most central to officialdom. Mandelbaum's edges are too sharp for either requirement, as his relations with the Clinton Administration showed. Their perfect embodiment is to be found in Ikenberry, 'the poet laureate of liberal internationalism', from whom the dead-centre of the establishment can draw on a more even unction. In 2006, the Princeton Project

¹⁹ Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World*, New York 2002, p. 412; and *Democracy's Good Name*, New York 2007, p. 231 (where he reflects that if the US had taken hold of Iraq in the nineteenth century, it could eventually have created the institutions and values needed for a democracy as the British did in India, producing a local equivalent of Nehru); *The Frugal Superpower*, New York 2010, pp. 76–7, 153 (which continues to hope that 'the American efforts in Iraq might someday come to be considered successful'). The modulation is not specific to Mandelbaum; it is widely distributed in the field.

²⁰ Mandelbaum, *Frugal Superpower*, pp. 98, 189–90.

on National Security unveiled the Final Paper he co-authored with Anne-Marie Slaughter, after some four hundred scholars and thinkers had contributed to the endeavour under their direction.²¹ With a bipartisan preface co-signed by Lake and Shultz, and the benefit of ‘candid conversations with Zbigniew Brzezinski and Madeleine Albright’, not to speak of the ‘wisdom and insight of Henry Kissinger’, *Forging a World of Liberty under Law: US National Security in the 21st Century* sought, Ikenberry and Slaughter explained, to offer nothing less than ‘a collective X article’ that would provide the nation with the kind of guidance in a new era that Kennan had supplied at the dawn of the Cold War—though NSC-68, too, remained an abiding inspiration.

How was a world of liberty under law to be brought about? Amid much familiar counsel, half a dozen more pointed proposals stand out. Across the planet, the United States would have to ‘bring governments up to PAR’—that is, seek to make them ‘popular, accountable and rights-regarding’. At the United Nations, the Security Council should be cleansed of the power of any member to veto actions of collective security, and the ‘responsibility to protect’ made obligatory on all member states. The Non-Proliferation Treaty needed to be tightened, by cutting down leeway for civilian development of nuclear power. In the interests of peace, the US had the right where necessary to launch preventive strikes against terrorists, and should be willing to ‘take considerable risks’ to stop Iran acquiring nuclear capability. Last but not least, a world-wide Concert of Democracies should be formed as an alternative seat of legitimacy for military interventions thwarted in the UN, capable of by-passing it.

Ikenberry’s subsequent theoretical offering, *Liberal Leviathan* (2011), revolves around the idea that since the American world order of its subtitle ‘reconciles power and hierarchy with cooperation and legitimacy’, it is—emphatically—a ‘liberal hegemony, not empire’. For what it rests on is a consensual ‘bargain’, in which the US obtains the cooperation of other states for American ends, in exchange for a system of rules that restrains American autonomy. Such was the genius of the multilateral Western alliance enshrined in NATO, and in bilateral form, of the Security

²¹ Slaughter, author of *A New World Order* (2004) and *The Idea that is America: Keeping Faith with Our Values in a Dangerous World* (2007), can be regarded as a runner-up in the stakes won by Ikenberry. Director of Policy Planning (2009–11) under Clinton at the State Department, she has, however, been ahead of the field in clamouring for interventions in Libya and Syria.

Pact with Japan, during the Cold War. In the backward outskirts of the world, no doubt, the US on occasion dealt in more imperious fashion with states that were clients rather than partners, but these were accessories without weight in the overall structure of international consent it enjoyed.²² Today, however, American hegemony was under pressure. A ‘crisis of authority’ had developed, not out of its failure, but from its very success. For with the extinction of the USSR, the US had become a unipolar power, tempted to act not by common rules it observed, but simply by relationships it established, leaving its traditional allies with less motive to defer to it just as new transnational fevers and forces—conspicuously terrorism—required a new set of responses. The Bush Administration had sought to meet the crisis with unilateral demonstrations of American will, in a regression to a conservative nationalism that was counter-productive. The solution to the crisis lay rather in a renewal of liberal internationalism, capable of renegotiating the hegemonic bargain of an earlier time to accommodate contemporary realities.

That meant, first and foremost, a return to multilateralism: the updating and refitting of a liberal democratic order, as ‘open, friendly, stable’ as of old, but with a wider range of powers included within it.²³ The expansion of NATO, the launching of NAFTA and the creation of the WTO were admirable examples. So too were humanitarian interventions, provided they won the assent of allies. Westphalian principles were outdated: the liberal international order now had to be more concerned with the internal condition of states than in the past. Once it had recovered its multilateral nerve, America could face the future confidently. Certainly, other powers were rising. But duly renegotiated, the system that served it so well

²² A discreet footnote informs us that ‘this study focuses primarily on the international order created by the United States and the other great powers. It does not fully illuminate the wider features of the world order that include America’s relations with weaker, less developed and peripheral states’: Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis and Transformation of the American World Order*, Princeton 2011, p. 27.

²³ In the kind of metaphor that comes readily to anyone’s mind: ‘If the old post-war hegemonic order were a business enterprise, it would have been called American Inc. It was an order that, in important respects, was owned and operated by the United States. The crisis today is really over ownership of that company. In effect, it is a transition from a semi-private company to one that is publicly owned and operated—with an expanding array of shareholders and new members on the board of directors’: Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 335. Like the metamorphosis of News Corp, one might say.

in the past could ‘slow down and mute the consequences of a return to multipolarity’. The far-flung order of American hegemony, arguably the most successful in world history, was ‘easy to join and hard to overturn’.²⁴ If the swing state of China were to sign up to its rules properly, it would become irresistible. A wise regional strategy in East Asia needs to be developed to that end. But it can be counted on: ‘The good news is that the US is fabulously good at pursuing a milieu-based grand strategy.’²⁵

At a global level, of course, there was bound to be some tension between the exigencies of continued American leadership and the norms of democratic community. The roles of liberal hegemon and traditional great power do not always coincide, and should they conflict too sharply, the grand bargain on which the peace and prosperity of the world rest would be at risk. For hegemony itself, admittedly, is not democratic.²⁶ But who is to complain if its outcome has been so beneficent? No irony is intended in the oxymoron of the book’s title. For Hobbes, a liberal Leviathan—liberal in this pious usage—would have been matter for grim humour.

IV

Within the same ideological bandwidth, an alternative prospectus can be found in the work of Charles Kupchan, once a co-author with Ikenberry, who has since drifted somewhat apart. On the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department under Baker, during the last year of the first Bush Presidency; promoted to Director of European Affairs on the National Security Council under Clinton; currently holder of a chair in the School of Foreign Service and Government at Georgetown and senior fellowship at the Council on Foreign Relations, Kupchan feared for liberal internationalism as the second Bush Presidency neared its end. During the Cold War, it had been the great tradition of American statecraft, combining a heavy investment in military force with a strong commitment to international institutions—power and partnership held in a balance that commanded a bipartisan consensus. Now, amid increasing polarization in Congress and public opinion, broad agreement on American foreign

²⁴ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. xi; ‘Liberal Order Building’, in Leffler and Legro, eds, *To Lead the World*, p. 103.

²⁵ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, pp. 343–4 ff; ‘Liberal Order Building’, p. 105.

²⁶ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 299.

policy had faded, and the compact on which it was based had broken apart. For under the second Bush, power had over-ridden partnership, in a conservative turn whose fall-out had greatly damaged the nation abroad. A new grand strategy was needed to repair the balance between the two, adapted to the changed circumstances in which the country now found itself.²⁷

Chief among these was the predictable loss of the absolute global predominance the United States had enjoyed at the conclusion of the Cold War. As early as 2002, Kupchan had sought to come to terms with this in *The End of the American Era*, arguing that while the US still enjoyed a unipolar predominance, power was becoming more diffused internationally, and the American public more inward-looking. Speculative excesses on Wall Street, moreover, were troubling.²⁸ So far the European Union, a huge success to date, was the only major competitor on the horizon. But the US would be prudent to meet the challenge of a more plural world in advance, lending it form with the creation of a 'global directorate', comprising Russia, China and Japan as well, and perhaps states from other parts of the earth too. That would involve 'a conscious effort to insulate foreign policy and its domestic roots from partisan politics', where regional cultures and interests were unfortunately diverging. A 'self-conscious political ceasefire' was required if liberal internationalism was to be revived.²⁹

A decade later, the diagnosis of *No One's World* (2012) was more radical. Economically, educationally and technologically, not only were other major powers closing the gap with the United States, but some—China

²⁷ Charles Kupchan and Peter Trubowitz, 'The Illusion of Liberal Internationalism's Revival', *International Security*, Summer 2010, arguing against complacency: it was wrong to maintain that liberal internationalism was in good shape in America. A vigorous new programme was needed to restore it to health.

²⁸ Kupchan's awareness that a financial bubble had developed under Clinton did not prevent him gushing that: 'The economic side of the house could not have been in better hands. Rubin will go down in history as one of the most distinguished and talented individuals to grace the Treasury since Alexander Hamilton': *The End of the American Era: us Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century*, New York 2002, p. 25.

²⁹ Kupchan, *End of the American Era*, pp. 296, 244. Kupchan's confidence in the political credentials of his country for global leadership remained unimpaired. Since it was 'not an imperial state with predatory intent', he informed his readers (in 2002), 'the United States is certainly more wanted than resented in most regions of the world, including the Middle East': p. 228.

foremost—would in due course overtake it in various measures. The result was going to be an interdependent world, with no single guardian or centre of gravity, in which the West could not, as Ikenberry implied, simply corral others into the institutional order it had created after the War. Rather, Kupchan argued, they would seek to revise it in accordance with their own interests and values, and the West would have to partner them in doing so. That would mean dropping the demand that they all be accredited democracies before being admitted to the shaping of a new system of international rules and conduct. Modernization was taking many different paths around the world, and there could be no dictating its forms elsewhere.

Three types of autocracy were salient in this emergent universe: communal, as in China; paternal, as in Russia; and tribal, as in the Gulf. Theocrats in Iran, strongmen in Africa, populists in Latin America, ‘democracies with attitude’ (less than friends of the US) like India, added to the brew. The United States, which had always stood for tolerance, pluralism and diversity at home, must extend the same multicultural respect for the variety of governments, doctrines and values abroad, and it could afford to do so. Since ‘capitalism had shown its universal draw’, there were few grounds for anxiety on that score. There was no need to insist on reproduction of Western forms of it. It was not liberal democracy that should be the standard for acceptance as a stake-holder in the global order to come, but ‘responsible governance’, enjoying legitimacy by local standards.³⁰

Meanwhile, the task was to restore the cohesion and vitality of the West, threatened by re-nationalization of politics in the European Union and polarization of them in the United States. At home Americans were confronted with economic distress and increasing inequality, in a political system paralysed by special interests and costly campaign finance. To overcome partisan deadlock and revitalize the economy, centrists should seek to muster a progressive populism that—without abandoning Western principles—would accept a measure of planning, ‘combining strategic guidance with the dynamism that comes from market competition’. To strengthen the cohesion of the Atlantic community, NATO must not only continue to be employed for out-of-area operations, as in the Balkans or Afghanistan, but converted into ‘the

³⁰ Kupchan, *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest and the Coming Global Turn*, New York 2012, p. 189.

West's main venue for coordinating engagement with rising powers—an endeavour in which, if it could be drawn into NATO, Moscow might in due time play a sterling role.³¹

The emerging multipolar landscape abroad, and the need to restore solvency at home, imposed a modest retrenchment of American commitments overseas. To husband resources, more reliance should be put on regional allies and a few bases might be closed. In compensation, Europe should step up its military spending. Kupchan ends his case with a general admonition: 'The United States still aspires to a level of global dominion for which it has insufficient resources and political will. American elites continue to embrace a national narrative consistent with this policy—"indispensable nation", "the American century", "America's moment"—these and other catchphrases like them still infuse political debate about US strategy. They crowd out considered debate about the more diverse global order that lies ahead.'³²

Ostensibly, in such declarations, *No One's World* marks a break with the axiomatic insistence on American primacy as the condition of international stability and progress that lies at the core of the foreign-policy consensus in the United States. Kupchan's intention, however, is not to bid farewell to the 'liberal internationalism' that served the country so staunchly during the Cold War, but to modernize it. Partnership needs to be brought back into balance with power. But the putative partners have changed and there is no point scrupling over assorted shortfalls from the norms of the Atlantic community, since all are *en route* to one form or other of capitalist modernity. Refurbishing partnership does not, however, entail relinquishing power. In the necessary work of constructing a new global consensus, 'the US must take the lead'. The purpose of a 'judicious and selective retrenchment' is not to wind down American influence at large, but 'to rebuild the bipartisan foundations for a steady and sustainable brand of US leadership'. In that task, 'American military primacy is a precious national asset', whose reconfiguration need not impair 'America's ability to project power on a global basis'.³³

³¹ Kupchan, *No One's World*, pp. 171, 111; 'NATO's Final Frontier: Why Russia Should Join the Atlantic Alliance', *Foreign Affairs*, May–June 2010.

³² Kupchan, *No One's World*, p. 204.

³³ Kupchan, *No One's World*, pp. 7, 179, 203; 'Grand Strategy: The Four Pillars of the Future', *Democracy—A Journal of Ideas*, Winter 2012, pp. 13–24, where Kupchan observes that the US 'must guard against doing too little', especially in the Persian

Nor, in admitting responsible autocracies to the counsels of the world, need America forsake its historic commitments to democracy and human rights. The ‘responsibility to protect’ was entirely consistent with it. Rogue states like Iran, the DRPK or Sudan must be confronted, and tyranny eradicated, where necessary by preventive intervention—optimally multilateral, as in NATO’s exemplary action in Libya, but in all cases humanitarian. Empires, like individuals, have their moments of false modesty. The kind of retrenchment envisaged by Kupchan belongs to them. Between the lines, its motto is an old one: *reculer pour mieux sauter*.

Gulf and East Asia, where ‘retrenchment must be accompanied by words and deeds that reassure allies of America’s staying power’; while in general, since ‘there is no substitute for the use of force in dealing with imminent threats’, the US needs to ‘refurbish its armed forces and remain ready for the full spectrum of possible missions’.

3. REALIST IDEALS

In apparently diametric contrast has been the output of the most influential thinker commonly identified with neo-conservatism, Robert Kagan. At Policy Planning and then the Inter-American Affairs desk in the State Department under Shultz and Baker, Kagan had a controlling part in the Contra campaign of the Reagan Administration, of which he later wrote the authoritative history, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977–1990*. A vigorous champion of the strategy of the second Bush for recasting the world, he was foreign-policy adviser to McCain during his run for the presidency. But, like most in-and-outers, he has readily crossed party lines, supporting Clinton in 1992 and counselling his wife at the State Department during the first Obama Administration. His fame dates from the book he published in 2003, *Of Paradise and Power*, during a season in Brussels as husband of the US deputy ambassador to NATO.³⁴ Appearing at the height of transatlantic tensions over the impending invasion of Iraq, it proposed an explanation of them that made short work of liberal bewailing of the rift in the Atlantic community.

Europe and America were divided, not as conventionally held, by subjective contrasts in culture or politics (the ‘social model’ of the Old World), but by differing objective situations, determining opposite outlooks. If the EU stood for law, in a Kantian world of patience and peaceful persuasion, and the US for power, in a Hobbesian world of vigilance and force, that was a function of their respective military capacities: weakness and strength. When this distribution was reversed, so were concomitant stances: in the nineteenth century, Americans typically appealed to international law and the values of peaceful commerce, denouncing power politics as Europeans do today, while Europeans practised—and preached—the necessities of *Realpolitik*, and the inherently agonistic character of an inter-state system whose ultimate resort was violence. In the twentieth century, with the change in the correlation of forces, there was an inversion of attitudes.³⁵

³⁴ Victoria Nuland: successively Chief of Staff to Strobe Talbott in the Clinton Administration; Deputy Foreign Policy Adviser to Cheney and later envoy to Brussels in the Bush Administration; currently Assistant Secretary for European Affairs in the Obama Administration.

³⁵ Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, New York 2003, pp. 7–11.

The inversion was not completely symmetrical, because above and beyond the objective ‘power gap’ of each epoch, there was the particularity of the history of each side. Traumatized by the internecine wars to which power politics in the Old World had led, Europe after 1945 accepted for fifty years complete strategic dependence on America in the battle against Communism. Then, once the Soviet Union had collapsed, Europe was effectively released from any such concerns. That did not mean, however, that it was capable of building a counter-power to the United States, or stepping again onto the world stage as a major actor. For European integration itself was such a complex, unprecedented process that it allowed for little consistent focus on anything external to it, while at the same time weakening—with enlargement of the EU—any capacity for unitary action. Contrary to the dreams of its enthusiasts, integration was the enemy of global power projection, not the condition of it. The result was very low military spending, no sign of any increase of it, and little strategic cooperation even within the EU itself.

The American experience was entirely different. Originally, the US too had been a ‘protected’ republic, guarded not only by two oceans but British naval power. But even when still a comparatively weak state by the standards of the time, it had always been expansionist—from Indian clearances to Mexican annexations, the seizure of Hawaii to the conquest of the Philippines—and no American statesman had ever doubted the future of the US as a great power and the superiority of American values to all others. Thereafter, the country knew no invasion or occupation, and only limited casualties in the two World Wars, emerging after 1945 as a global power in the Cold War. In turn, the end of the Cold War had led to no retraction of US might, or withdrawal to the homeland, but on the contrary to a further expansion of American power projection, first under Clinton and then under Bush, with a giant leap forward after the attacks of 9/11. For just as Pearl Harbour had led to the occupation of Japan and the transformation of the US into an East Asian power, so the Twin Towers was going to make the US a Middle Eastern power *in situ*.³⁶ A new era of American hegemony was just beginning.

Under its protective mantle, Europe had entered a post-historical paradise, cultivating the arts of peace, prosperity and civilized living. Who could blame them? Americans, who stood guard against the threats in the Hobbesian world beyond this Kantian precinct, could not enter that

³⁶ Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, pp. 95–6.

Eden, and proud of their might, had no wish to do so. They had helped create the European Union and should cherish it, taking greater diplomatic care with its susceptibilities, just as Europeans should learn to value and adjust to the new level of American paramountcy, in a world where the triumph of capitalism made the cohesion of the West less pressing, and the remaining enemy of Muslim fundamentalism posed no serious ideological challenge to liberalism. In Washington multilateralism had always been instrumental, practised in the interests of the US, rather than as an ideal in itself. There was less need for that now, and if it had to act alone, no reason for America to be shackled by European inhibitions. The pleasures of Venus were to be respected; the obligations of Mars lay elsewhere.

Expanding the thumbnail sketch of the American past in *Paradise and Power* to a full-length survey with *Dangerous Nation* (2006), Kagan took direct aim at the self-image of the US as historically an inward-looking society, venturing only reluctantly and sporadically into the outside world. From the outset, it had on the contrary been an aggressive, expansionist force, founded on ethnic cleansing, land speculation and slave labour, unabashed heir to the ruthless legacy of British colonialism in the New World. In a detailed narrative demystifying one episode after another, from the Seven Years War to the Spanish–American War—with most of which, apart from the scant role accorded ideals of a Christian Commonwealth, William Appleman Williams would have found little to disagree—Kagan emphasized the central importance of the Civil War as the model, not only for the American use of unrestrained power with divine approval—as Lincoln put it, ‘the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether’—but as the template for future enterprises in ideological conquest and nation-building.³⁷

Two years later, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* made good a weak joint in the argument of *Paradise and Power*. If, after Communism, Muslim fundamentalism was left as the only ideological alternative to liberalism, yet was too archaic to pose any serious challenge to it, the conflict with it could only be a side-show, with no resemblance to the Cold War. But in that case where were the menacing dangers from which Mars had to protect Venus? Correcting aim, Kagan now explained that the liberal international order extolled by Mandelbaum and Ikenberry

³⁷ Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America and the World 1600–1900*, London 2006, pp. 269–70.

had not, as they imagined, superseded great-power conflicts of old. These were re-emerging in the new century with the rise of China and recovery of Russia—vast autocracies antithetical by their nature to the democracies of the West, whose rulers were not mere kleptocrats lolling in wealth and power for their own sake, but leaders who believed that in bringing order and prosperity to their nations, and restoring their global influence and prestige, they were serving a higher cause. Well aware that the democracies would like to overthrow them, they were unlikely to be softened to the West, as often hoped, by mere commercial ties and economic interdependence. Historically, trade had rarely trumped the emotional forces of national pride and political competition.³⁸ It was a delusion to believe that a peaceful, consensual ecumene was around the corner. The time for dreams was over. The great powers shared few common values; the autocracies were antagonists. A League of Democracies was needed to prevail over them.

The World America Made (2012) brought reassurance in this struggle. Threatening though China and Russia might be, the United States was more than capable of seeing them off. Like that of Rome in its day, or for millennia imperial China, the American order of the twentieth century had established norms of conduct, shaped ideas and beliefs, determined legitimacies of rule, around itself. Peace and democracy had spread under its carapace. But these were not the fruit of American culture, wisdom or ideals. They were effects of the attraction exercised by American power, without which they could not have arrived. That power—for all the excesses or failures of which, like any predecessor, it has never been exempt—remains, exceptionally, accepted and abetted by others. In a historically unique pattern, no coalition has attempted to balance against it.

That is not because American power has always been used sparingly, or in accordance with international law, or after consultation with allies, or simply because of the benefits its liberal order confers at large. Crucial is also the fact the United States alone is not contiguous with any other great power, as are Europe, Russia, China, India and Japan, all of whom have more reason to fear their immediate neighbours than distant America. On this stage there can be no ‘democratic peace’,

³⁸ Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, New York 2008, pp. 78–80. This depiction of the great autocracies is just where Kupchan would later take issue with Kagan.

because Russia and China are not democracies; and what peace there is remains too brief an experience—since 1945, only twenty years longer than 1870–1914—to rely on nuclear weapons to keep indefinitely. The only reliable guarantee of peace continues to be US predominance. Should that fade, the world would be at risk. But happily America is not in decline. Its world-historical position is like that of Britain in 1870, not later. Domestic economic problems there are, which need to be fixed. The country is not omnipotent. But it suffers no overstretch in troops or cash, military spending remaining a modest percentage of GDP. Its hegemony is essentially unimpaired, and will remain so, for as long as Americans harken to Theodore Roosevelt’s call: ‘Let us base a wise and practical internationalism on a sound and intense nationalism.’³⁹

The authority of the first Roosevelt indicates the distance of this body of writing from the pedigree descending from Wilson, at its most pronounced in *Paradise and Power* and *Dangerous Nation*. But the adage itself speaks to the underlying invariant of the ideology of American foreign policy since the Second World War, which had its equivalent in imperial China: *ru biao, fa li*—decoratively Confucian, substantively Legalist.⁴⁰ Liberal internationalism is the obligatory idiom of American imperial power. Realism, in risking a closer correspondence to its practice, remains facultative and subordinate. The first can declare itself as such, and regularly achieve virtually pure expression. The second must pay tribute to the first, and offer an articulation of the two. So it is with Kagan. In 2007, he joined forces with Ivo Daalder—a perennial Democratic stand-by, in charge of Bosnian affairs on Clinton’s National Security Council, later Obama’s Ambassador to NATO—to advocate a League of Democracies virtually identical with the Concert of Democracies proposed a year earlier by Ikenberry and Slaughter as a way of firming up support for humanitarian interventions.⁴¹ Reaffirmed in *The Return of*

³⁹ Kagan, *The World America Made*, New York 2012, p. 98.

⁴⁰ Literally: ‘Confucianism on the outside, Legalism on the inside’—Legalism in Ancient China representing rule by force, Confucianism by sanctimony of benevolence.

⁴¹ The first version of this notion was the ‘Community of Democracies’ launched by Albright in 2000—among invitees: Mubarak’s Egypt, Aliyev’s Azerbaijan and the Khalifa dynasty in Bahrain. The leading manifesto for a more muscular League of Democracies came from Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, ‘Democracies of the World, Unite’, *The American Interest*, Jan–Feb 2007 (elder statesmen on its proposed Advisory Board to include Fischer, Menem, Koizumi and Singh), followed by Daalder and Kagan, ‘The Next Intervention’, *Washington Post*, 6 August 2007, and Kagan, ‘The Case for a League of Democracies’, *Financial Times*, 13 May 2008.

History and adopted as a platform by McCain in 2008, with Kagan at his side, this conception was Wilsonism cubed, alarming even many a *bona fide* liberal. It was soon shot down as unwelcome to America's allies in Europe and provocative to its adversaries in Russia and China, who were better coaxed tactfully into the ranks of free nations than stigmatized *ab initio* as strangers to them. *The World America Made* had better luck. Its case captivated Obama, who confided his enthusiasm for it on the eve of his State of the Union Address in 2012, in which he proclaimed 'America is back'.⁴² Kagan would return the compliment, crediting Obama not only with 'a very smart policy in Asia'—the opening of a new base in Australia 'a powerful symbol of America's enduring strategic presence in the region'—but a welcome return to 'a pro-democracy posture not only in the Middle East, but also in Russia and Asia'. If the record was marred by failure to secure agreement from Baghdad to continuing US troops in Iraq, it was star-spangled by the intervention in Libya. The terms of Kagan's praise speak for themselves: 'Obama placed himself in a great tradition of American presidents who have understood America's special role in the world. He thoroughly rejected the so-called realist approach, extolled American exceptionalism, spoke of universal values and insisted that American power should be used, when appropriate, on behalf of those values.'⁴³

II

Realism comes, without such disavowals, in a more unusual amalgam in the outlook of a thinker with Cold War credentials superior even to those of Kagan. Responsible, as Carter's National Security Adviser, for the American operation arming and bankrolling the Islamist revolt against Afghan communism and subsequent war to drive the Red Army out of the country, Zbigniew Brzezinski is the highest former office-holder in the gallery of contemporary US strategists. From a Polish *szlachta* background, his European origins offer a misleading comparison with

⁴² 'In an off-the-record meeting with leading news anchors', *Foreign Policy* reported, 'Obama drove home that argument using an article written in the *New Republic* by Kagan titled "The Myth of American Decline". Obama liked Kagan's article so much that he spent more than 10 minutes talking about it in the meeting, going over its arguments paragraph by paragraph, National Security Council spokesman Tommy Vietor confirmed.' The article was a pre-publication excerpt from *The World America Made*.

⁴³ *Weekly Standard*, 28 March 2011.

Kissinger.⁴⁴ The contrast in formation and outlook is marked. Where Kissinger fancied himself as the heir to balance-of-power statesmen of the Old World, Brzezinski comes from the later, and quite distinct, line of geopolitics. This is a filiation more radically distant from the Wilsonian pieties to which Kissinger has always paid nominal tribute. But in this case the harder-edged realism to which it tends, free from liturgies of democracy and the market, comes combined with a *Kulturkritik* of classically minatory stamp, whose genesis lies in the rhetoric of malaise associated with Carter's Presidency. Brzezinski's tenure in power, cut short when Reagan was elected in 1980, was only half Kissinger's, leaving him with a greater drive to make his mark during subsequent administrations, with a succession of five books timed around electoral calendars: *Out of Control* (1993) as Clinton took office; *The Grand Chessboard* (1997) as he started his second term; *The Choice* (2004) as Kerry battled Bush for the White House; *Second Chance* (2007), as the prospect for Democratic recapture of it loomed; *Strategic Vision* (2012), as Obama approached a second term.⁴⁵

Brzezinski laid out his general vision in the first of these works, which he dedicated to Carter. Far from victory in the Cold War ushering in a new world order of international tranquillity, security and common prosperity, the United States was faced with an era of global turmoil, of which the country was itself one of the chief causes. For while the Soviet Union might have gone, there were no grounds for domestic complacency. American society was not just pockmarked with high levels of indebtedness, trade deficits, low savings and investment, sluggish productivity growth, inadequate health-care, inferior secondary education, deteriorating infrastructure, greedy rich and homeless poor, racism and crime, political gridlock—ills enumerated by Brzezinski long before they became a standard list in buck-up literature along Friedman–Mandelbaum lines. It was more deeply corroded by a culture

⁴⁴ Brzezinski did not arrive in North America as a refugee in 1938, but as an offspring of the Polish Consul-General in Canada.

⁴⁵ As could be surmised from this scheduling, Brzezinski's ties to the Democratic Party have been closer than Kissinger's to the Republican, without being exclusive: see his amicable dialogue with Brent Scowcroft, National Security Adviser to the elder Bush, in *America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy*, New York 2008. His comments on Obama have been generally laudatory—'a genuine sense of strategic direction and a solid grasp of what today's world is all about'—while urging the President to be more intrepid: 'From Hope to Audacity: Appraising Obama's Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, Jan–Feb 2010.

of hedonistic self-indulgence and demoralized individualism. A 'permissive cornucopia' had bred massive drug use, sexual license, visual-media corruption, declining civic pride and spiritual emptiness. Yet at the same time, in the attractions of its material wealth and seductions of its popular culture, the US was a destabilizing force everywhere in the less advanced zones of the world, disrupting traditional ways of life and tempting unprepared populations into the same 'dynamic escalation of desire' that was undoing America.

Such effects were all the more incendiary in that across most of the—still poor and underdeveloped—earth, turmoil was in store as the youth bulge unleashed by population explosion interacted with the growth of literacy and electronic communications systems to detonate a 'global political awakening'. As this got under way, newly activated masses were prone to primitive, escapist and manichean fantasies, of an ethnically narrow and often anti-Western bent, insensible of the needs for pluralism and compromise. The export of an American lack of self-restraint could only add fuel to the fire. Politically, the United States was the guardian of order in the world; culturally, it was a force sowing disorder. This was an extremely dangerous contradiction. To resolve it, America would have to put its own house in order. 'Unless there is some deliberate effort to re-establish the centrality of some moral criteria for the exercise of self-control over gratification as an end in itself, the phase of American predominance may not last long', Brzezinski warned: it was unlikely that a 'global power that is not guided by a globally relevant set of values can for long exercise its predominance'.⁴⁶ A new respect for nature must ultimately be part of this, even if rich and poor societies might not share the same ecological priorities. At home economic and social problems, however acute, were less intractable than metaphysical problems of common purpose and meaning. What America needed above all—Brzezinski disavowed any particular prescriptions for reform—was cultural reevaluation and philosophical self-examination, not to be achieved overnight.

Meanwhile, the affairs of the world could not wait. American hegemony might be at risk from American dissolution, but the only alternative to it was global anarchy—regional wars, economic hostilities, social upheavals, ethnic conflicts. For all its faults, the United States continued to enjoy an absolute superiority in all four key dimensions of

⁴⁶ Brzezinski, *Out of Control*, New York 1993, p. xii.

power—military, economic, technological, cultural; and it was a benign hegemon, whose dominance, though in some ways reminiscent of earlier empires, relied more than its predecessors on co-option of dependent elites rather than outright subjugation. Huntington was right that sustained American primacy was central to the future of freedom, security, open markets and peaceful relations world-wide. To preserve these, the US required ‘an integrated, comprehensive and long-term geopolitical strategy’ for the great central landmass of the earth, on whose fate the pattern of global power depended: ‘For America, the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia.’⁴⁷

From *The Grand Chessboard* (1997) onwards, this would be the object of Brzezinski’s work, with a more detailed set of prescriptions than any of his peers has offered. Since the end of the Cold War, his construction begins, a non-Eurasian power was for the first time in history pre-eminent in Eurasia. America’s global primacy depended on its ability to sustain that preponderance. How was it to do so? In the struggle against communism, the US had entrenched itself at the western and eastern peripheries of the mega-continent, in Europe and Japan, and along its southern rim, in the Gulf. Now, however, the Soviet Union had vanished and the Russia that succeeded it had become a huge black hole across the middle of Eurasia, of top strategic concern for the United States. It was illusory to think that democracy and a market economy could take root swiftly, let alone together, in this geopolitical void. Traditions for the former were lacking, and shock therapy to introduce the latter had been folly.

The Russian elites were resentful of the historic reduction of their territory, and potentially vengeful; there existed the makings of a Russian fascism. The biggest single blow for them was the independence of Ukraine, to which they were not resigned. To check any temptations of revanchism in Moscow, the US should build a barrier encompassing Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan to the south, and—crucially—extending NATO to the east. For Brzezinski, expansion of the Atlantic Alliance to the borders of Russia was the most important single priority of the post-Cold War era. Pushed through by his former pupil Albright at the State Department—a son was also closely involved at the National Security Council—its realization was a huge achievement. For with Europe serving as a springboard for the progressive expansion

⁴⁷ Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, New York 1997, p. 29.

of democracy deeper into Eurasia, the arrival of NATO at their frontiers might in due course persuade Russians that it was to good relations with the EU that they should turn for their future, abandoning any nostalgia for an imperial past, even perhaps—why not?—breaking up into three more modest states, one west of the Urals, one in Siberia and a third in the Far East, or a loose confederation between them.

The EU, for its part, sharing a common civilizational heritage with the US, no doubt pointed the way to larger forms of post-national organization: ‘But first of all, Europe is America’s essential geopolitical bridgehead on the Eurasian continent.’ Regrettably, it was not itself in the pink of condition, suffering from a pervasive decline in internal vitality and loss of creative momentum, with symptoms of escapism and lack of nerves in the Balkans. Germany was helpful in the expansion of NATO, and France could balance it with Poland. Britain was an irrelevance. But as to their common status, Brzezinski did not mince words: ‘The brutal fact is that Western Europe, and increasingly Central Europe, remains largely an American protectorate, with its allied states reminiscent of ancient vassals and tributaries.’⁴⁸ This was not a healthy situation. Nor, on the other hand, was the prospect of Europe becoming a great power capable of competing with the United States, in such regions of vital interest to it as the Middle East or Latin America, desirable. Any such rivalry would be destructive to both sides. Each had their own diplomatic traditions. But ‘an essentially multilateralist Europe and a somewhat unilateralist America make for a perfect marriage of convenience. Acting separately, America can be preponderant but not omnipotent; Europe can be rich but impotent. Acting together, America and Europe are in effect globally omnipotent.’⁴⁹

This last was an uncharacteristic flourish. At the other end of Eurasia, Brzezinski was more prudent. There, for want of any collective security system, Japan could not play the same kind of role as Germany in Europe. It remained, however, an American bastion, which could be encouraged to play the role of an Asian Canada—wealthy, harmless, respected, philanthropic. But what of China? Proud of his role under Carter in negotiating diplomatic relations with Beijing as a counterweight to Moscow, Brzezinski—like Kissinger, for the same reasons—has consistently warned against any policies that could be construed as building a coalition against China, which was inevitably going to become the dominant

⁴⁸ Brzezinski, *Grand Chessboard*, p. 58.

⁴⁹ Brzezinski, *The Choice*, New York 2004, pp. 91, 96.

regional—though not yet a global—power. The best course would clearly be ‘to co-opt a democratizing and free-marketing China into a larger Asian regional framework of cooperation’. Even short of such a happy outcome, however, ‘China should become America’s Far Eastern anchor in the more traditional domain of power politics’, serving as ‘a vitally important geostrategic asset—in that regard coequally important with Europe and more weighty than Japan—in assuring Eurasia’s stability’.⁵⁰ Still, a thorny question remained: ‘To put it very directly, how large a Chinese sphere of influence, and where, should America be prepared to accept as part of a policy of successfully co-opting China into world affairs? What areas now outside of China’s political radius might have to be conceded to the realm of the reemerging Celestial Empire?’⁵¹ To resolve that ticklish issue, a strategic consensus between Washington and Beijing was required, but it did not have to be settled immediately. For the moment, it would be important to invite China to join the G7.

Western and eastern flanks of Eurasia secured, there remained the southern front. There, some thirty lesser states comprised an ‘oblong of violence’ stretching from Suez to Xinjiang that could best be described as a Global Balkans—a zone rife with ethnic and religious hatreds, weak governments, a menacing youth bulge, not to speak of dangers of nuclear proliferation, but rich in oil, gas and gold. The US was too distant from Central Asia to be able to dominate it, but could block Russian attempts to restore its hold on the area. In the Middle East, on the other hand, the US had since the Gulf War enjoyed an exclusive preponderance. But this was a brittle dominion, Brzezinski warned, lacking political or cultural roots in the region, too reliant on corrupt local elites to do its bidding. After the attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, he was critical of the War on Terror as an over-reaction that mistook a tactic—age-old among the weak—for an enemy, refusing to see the political problems in the Arab world that lay behind it, in which the US had played a part. Nor was it any good trying to foist democracy on the region as a solution. Patience was needed in the Middle East, where gradual social modernization was the best way forward, not artificial democratization. The US and EU should spell out the terms of a peace treaty between Israelis and Palestinians, on which there was an international consensus: mutual adjustment of the 1967 borders, merely symbolic return of refugees and demilitarization of any future Palestine.

⁵⁰ Brzezinski, *Grand Chessboard*, pp. 54, 193, 207.

⁵¹ Brzezinski, *Grand Chessboard*, p. 54.

In Brzezinski's later works, many of these themes were radicalized. *Second Chance* (2007) offered a scathing retrospect of the foreign-policy performance of Bush I, Clinton and Bush II. The first, though handling the end of the Cold War skillfully enough (if unable to see the importance of backing Ukrainian independence and breaking up the Soviet Union), bungled the unsatisfactory outcome of the Gulf War, which might have been avoided by exchanging forcible exile for Saddam against preservation of the Iraqi Army, and missed the unique chance it gave the White House of imposing a peace settlement on Israel and the Palestinians in the wake of it. There was no real substance to his talk of a new world order, which in its absence could only look like a relapse to the 'old imperial order'. Clinton had one great accomplishment to his credit, expansion of NATO; another of some moment, in the creation of the WTO; and had at least restored fiscal balance at home. But he too had failed to get a peace settlement in the Middle East, bringing Israelis and Palestinians together at Camp David too late, and then favouring the latter too much. His faith in the vapid mantra of globalization had bred a complacent economic determinism, resulting in a casual and opportunist conduct of foreign affairs.

Worse still were the neo-conservative doctrines that replaced it, which without 9/11 would have remained a fringe phenomenon. Under the second Bush, these had led to a war in Iraq whose costs far outweighed its benefits, not only diverting resources from the struggle in Afghanistan, but causing a grievous loss of American standing in the world. This dismal record was compounded by failure of the Doha Round, and an ill-starred nuclear deal with India, risking Chinese ire.⁵² Virtually

⁵² Brzezinski would later criticize Obama's sale of advanced weaponry to India too, and on the same grounds warn against advocates of a closer bond with Delhi. Prominent among the latter has been Fareed Zakaria, who enthuses that it is all but inevitable that the US will develop more than a merely strategic relationship with India. For not only are Indians perhaps the most pro-American nation on earth, but the two peoples are so alike—'Indians understand America. It is a noisy, open society with a chaotic democratic system, like theirs. Its capitalism looks distinctly like America's free-for-all', just as 'Americans understand India', having had such 'a positive experience with Indians in America'. The ties between the two countries, Zakaria predicts, will be like those of the US with Britain or Israel: 'broad and deep, going well beyond government officials and diplomatic negotiations': *The Post-American World*, New York 2008, pp. 150–2, a work of which Christopher Layne has remarked that it would more appropriately be entitled *The Now and Forever American World*: see Sean Clark and Sabrina Hoque, eds, *Debating a Post-American World: What Lies Ahead?*, New York 2012, p. 42.

everywhere, major geopolitical trends had moved against the United States. 'Fifteen years after its coronation as global leader, America is becoming a fearful and lonely democracy in a politically antagonistic world'.⁵³ Nor was the situation better at home. Of the fourteen out of twenty maladies of the country he had listed in 1993 that were measurable, nine had worsened since. The US was in bad need of a cultural revolution and regime change of its own.

Yet, *Strategic Vision* insists five years later, American decline would be a disaster for the world, which more than ever is in want of responsible American leadership. Though still skirting obsolescence at home and looking out of touch abroad, the US retained great strengths, along with its weaknesses. These it should put to work in a grand strategy for Eurasia that could now be updated. Its objectives ought to be two. The West should be enlarged by the integration of Turkey and Russia fully within its framework, extending its frontiers to Van and Vladivostok, and all but reaching Japan. European youth could re-populate and dynamize Siberia. In East Asia, the imperative was to create a balance between the different powers of the region. Without prejudice to that aim, China could be invited to form a G2 with the United States. But China should remember that, if it gave way to nationalist temptations, it could find itself rapidly isolated, for 'unlike America's favourable geographical location, China is potentially vulnerable to a strategic encirclement. Japan stands in the way of China's access to the Pacific Ocean, Russia separates China from Europe, and India towers over an ocean named after itself that serves as China's main access to the Middle East.' A map repairs the tactful omission of the US from this ring of powers.⁵⁴

Geopolitically then, 'America must adopt a dual role. It must be the *promoter* and *guarantor* of greater and broader unity in the West, and it must be the *balancer* and *conciliator* between the major powers in the East'.⁵⁵ But it should never forget that, as Raymond Aron once wrote, 'the strength of a great power is diminished if it ceases to serve an idea'. The higher purpose of American hegemony, which would not last forever, was the creation of a stable framework to contain potential turmoil, based on a community of shared values that alone could overcome 'the global crisis of the spirit'. Democracy, the demand for which had been

⁵³ Brzezinski, *Second Chance*, New York 2007, p. 181.

⁵⁴ Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision*, New York 2012, pp. 85–6.

⁵⁵ Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision*, p. 185.

over-rated even in the fall of communism, in which many other longings were involved, was not the indicated answer.⁵⁶ That lay in another ideal: ‘Only by identifying itself with the idea of universal human dignity—with its basic requirement of respect for culturally diverse political, social and religious emanations—can America overcome the risk that the global political awakening will turn against it.’⁵⁷

In its peculiar register, Brzezinski’s overall construction—part geopolitical, part metacultural—does not escape, but replicates, the dualism of the American ideology for foreign service since 1945.⁵⁸ In his formulation: ‘idealistic internationalism is the common-sense dictate of hard-nosed realism’. But in his latter-day version of the combinatory, both components have a markedly European inflection: a *Realpolitik* based on a geographical calculus descending from Mackinder, and a *Kulturkritik* of contemporary mores descending from Arnold or Nietzsche. As a tradition, *Kulturkritik* has always tended to a pessimism at radical variance with the optimism of the American Creed, as Myrdal classically depicted it. In Brzezinski’s case, the late absence of that national note has no doubt also been a function of his fortunes, the coolness of his view of post-Cold War euphoria due in part to displeasure that credit for the collapse of communism was so widely ascribed to the Reagan rather than Carter or earlier administrations, and the acerbity of his judgement of subsequent presidencies to his failure to return to high office—a sharpness of tongue at once cause and effect of lack of preferment. In his capacity to deliver blunt truths about his adopted country and its allies—the United States with its ‘hegemonic elite’ of ‘imperial bureaucrats’, a Europe of ‘protectorates’ and ‘vassals’ dependent on them—Brzezinski breaks ranks with his fellows. Emollience is not among his failings.

In its departures from the American norm, the substance, as well as style, of his output bears the marks of his European origins. Above all, in the relentless Russophobia, outlasting the fall of communism and the disappearance of the Soviet foe, that is a product of centuries of Polish

⁵⁶ Brzezinski, *Out of Control*, pp. 54, 60–1. In fact, democracy had become since the fall of communism a dubiously uniform ideology, ‘most governments and most political actors paying lip-service to the same verities and relying on the same clichés’.

⁵⁷ Brzezinski, *Second Chance*, p. 204.

⁵⁸ For ‘metaculture’ and *Kulturkritik* as a subspecies of it, see Francis Mulhern, *Culture/Metaculture*, London 2000, and ‘Beyond Metaculture’, *NLR* 16, July–Aug 2002.

history. For two decades his Eurasian strategies would revolve around the spectre of a possible restoration of Russian power. China, by contrast, he continued to view, not only out of personal investment in his past, but anachronistic fixation on the conjuncture of his achievement, as America's ally against a common enemy in Moscow. When it finally dawned on him that China had become a much greater potential threat to the global hegemony of the United States, he simply switched pieces on the chessboard of his imaginary, now conceiving Russia as the geopolitical arm of an elongated West linking Europe to Japan, to encircle China, rather than China as the American anchor in the east against Russia. In their detachment from reality, these schemes—culminating at one point in a Trans-Eurasian Security system stretching from Tokyo to Dublin—belong with the American self-projections from which Brzezinski's thinking otherwise departs: where tough-minded realism becomes rosy-eyed ideation.

III

Tighter and more dispassionate, the writing of Robert Art, occupying a position further away from the Wilsonian centre of the spectrum, offers a pointed contrast. Analytic precision, closely reasoned argument and lucid moderation of judgement are its hallmarks, producing a realism at higher resolution.⁵⁹ The difference begins with Art's definition of his object. 'Grand strategy differs from foreign policy'. The latter covers all the ways the interests of a state may be conceived, and the instruments with which they may be pursued. The former refers more narrowly to the ways a state employs its military power to support its national interests: 'Foreign policy deals with all the goals and all the instruments of statecraft; grand strategy deals with all the goals but only one instrument.'⁶⁰ It is the role of armed force in America's conduct in the world that is the unswerving focus of Art's concern. Less visible to the public eye than others, with no best-seller to his name, from his chair at Brandeis he has served more discreetly as a consultant to the Pentagon—Long-Range Planning Staff under Weinberger—and the CIA.

⁵⁹ Art's three role models, he explains, are Spykman, Lippman and Tucker, authors of 'perhaps the best books written on American grand strategy in the last half century', whose geopolitical tradition he has sought to follow: *A Grand Strategy for America*, New York 2003, p. xv.

⁶⁰ Art, *America's Grand Strategy and World Politics*, New York 2008, p. 1.

Art's starting-point is the fungibility—not unlimited, but substantial—of military power: the different ways in which it can be cashed out politically or economically. Coercive diplomacy, using the threat of force to compel another state to do the bidding of a stronger one—tried by Washington, he notes, over a dozen times between 1990 and 2006—is rarely a conspicuous success: among its failures to date, attempts to oblige Iran or the DPRK to abandon their nuclear programmes. Nuclear weapons, on the other hand, are more useful than is often supposed, not only as deterrence against potential attack, but for the wide margin of safety they afford for diplomatic manoeuvre; the advantages to be extracted from states to which their protection may extend; and the resources which the cost-efficiency of the security they provide releases for other purposes. More generally, so long as anarchy obtains between states, force not only remains the final arbiter of disputes among them, but affects the ways these may be settled short of force.

Of that there is no more positive example than the role of US military power in binding together the nations of the free world after 1945, by creating the political conditions for the evolutionary intertwining of their economies: 'Force cannot be irrelevant as a tool of policy for America's economic relations with her great power allies: America's military pre-eminence politically pervades these relations. It is the cement of economic interdependence.'⁶¹ The Japanese and West Europeans could grow and prosper together under the safety of a US nuclear umbrella whose price was submission to American monetary and diplomatic arrangements. For 'it would be odd indeed if this dependence were not exploited by the United States on political and economic matters of interest to it'. So it has been—Washington first obliging its ally Britain, even before the arrival of the A-bomb, to accept fixed exchange rates at Bretton Woods, and then cutting the link of the dollar to gold in 1971, not only without consulting its allies, but for twenty years thereafter confronting them with unpleasant choices between inflation and recession. Without its military pre-eminence, as well as its industrial strength, the US could never have acted as it did: 'America used her military power politically to cope with her dollar devaluation problem.' We are a long way from the placebo of the nation of nations.

Since the end of the Cold War, what are the purposes the armed forces of the US should serve? Atypically, Art ranks them in an explicit hierarchy,

⁶¹ Art, *America's Grand Strategy*, p. 132.

distinguishing between interests that are actually vital and those that are only desirable, in an updated geopolitics. Vital include, in order of importance: security of the homeland against weapons of mass destruction, prevention of great power conflicts in Eurasia, a steady flow of oil from Arabia. Desirable, in order of importance, are: preservation of an open international economic order, fostering of democracy and defence of human rights, protection of the global environment. The course Art recommends for pursuing these goals is ‘selective engagement’: a strategy that gives priority to America’s vital interests, but ‘holds out hope that the desirable interests can be partially realized’, striking a balance between trying to use force to do too much and to do too little.⁶² Operationally, selective engagement is a strategy of forward defence, allowing a reduction of overall American troop levels, but requiring the maintenance of US military bases overseas, where they serve not only as guardians of political stability, but also checks on economic nationalism.

In the same way, the expansion of the Atlantic Alliance to the east—a top-down project of the Clinton Administration from the start—was designed not just to fill a security vacuum or give NATO a new lease of life, but to preserve American hegemony in Europe. In the Middle East, policy in the Gulf should be to ‘divide, not conquer’, pitting the various oil-rich rulers against each other without attempting closer management of them. In Afghanistan, the US had to stay the course. On the other hand, it would be folly to attack Iran. The security of Israel was an essential American interest. But a settlement of the Palestinian problem would be the most important single step in undercutting support for anti-American terrorism. The path to achieving it lay in a formal defence treaty with Israel, stationing US forces on its territory and obliging it to disgorge the occupied territories. In East Asia, the security of South Korea was also an essential American interest. But the goal of American policy should be the denuclearization and unification of the peninsula. Should China gain preponderant influence in Korea thereafter, that could be accepted. The US alliance with Korea was expendable, as the alliance with Japan—the bedrock of American presence, and condition of its maritime supremacy, in East Asia—was not.

Looming over the region was the rise of China. How should the United States respond to it? Not by treating the PRC as a potential danger

⁶² Art, *America’s Grand Strategy*, p. 235.

comparable to the USSR of old. The Soviet Union had been a geopolitical menace to both Europe and the Gulf. China was neither. If it eventually came to dominate much of South-East Asia, as it might Korea, so what? Provided the US held naval bases in Singapore, the Philippines or Indonesia, while Europe, the Gulf, India, Russia and Japan remained independent or tied to the US, Chinese hegemony on land in East and South-East Asia would not tip the global balance of power. The PRC could never be the same kind of threat to American influence that the Soviet Union, straddling the vast expanse of Eurasia, had once represented. Friction over Taiwan aside—resolvable in due course either by reduction of the island to a dependency of the mainland through economic leverage, or political reunification with it if the mainland democratized—there was no basis for war between America and China. Beijing would build up a powerful navy, but it would not be one capable of challenging US command of the Pacific. In fact, China needed to acquire a sea-based nuclear deterrent if mutually assured destruction was to work, and the US should not oppose it doing so.

The role of force endured, as it must. American political and economic statecraft could not be successful without the projection of military power abroad to shape events, not just to react to them; to mould an environment, not merely to survive in one. That did not mean it should be employed recklessly or indiscriminately. Art, unlike so many who supported it at the time and dissociated themselves from it later, was a prominent opponent of the war on Iraq six months before it began,⁶³ and once underway condemned it as a disaster. ‘Muscular Wilsonism’ had led to disgrace and loss of legitimacy. Even selective engagement was not immune from the inherent temptations of an imperial power—for such was the United States—to attempt too much, rather than too little. Its global primacy would last only a few more decades. Thereafter, the future probably lay in the transition to ‘an international system suspended for a long time between a US-dominated and a regionally based, decentralized one’.⁶⁴ The country would do well to prepare for that time, and meanwhile put its economic house in order.

⁶³ See ‘War with Iraq is *Not* in America’s National Interest’, *New York Times*, 26 September 2002, an advertisement signed by some thirty ‘scholars of international security affairs’: among others, Robert Jervis, John Mearsheimer, Robert Pape, Barry Posen, Richard Rosecrance, Thomas Schelling, Stephen Van Evera, Stephen Walt and Kenneth Waltz.

⁶⁴ Art, *America’s Grand Strategy*, p. 387.

As a theorist of national security, Art remains within the bounds of the foreign-policy establishment, sharing its unquestioned assumption of the need for American primacy in the world, if disorder is not to supervene.⁶⁵ But within its literature, the intellectual quality of his work stands out, not only for its lack of rhetorical pathos, but the calmness and respect with which other, less conventional, positions are considered, and certain orthodox taboos broken. Opposition from the outset to the war on Iraq, impatience with obduracy from Israel, acceptance of regional ascendancy for China, can be found in Brzezinski too. But not only utterly dissimilar styles separate them. Art is not obsessed with Russia—its absence is striking in his recent reflections—and his proposals for Tel Aviv and Beijing have more edge: forcing an unwelcome treaty on the one; conceding an extended hegemony on land, and a strike-capacity at sea, to the other. In all this, the spirit of the neo-realism, in its technical sense, to which Art belongs—whose foremost representative Kenneth Waltz could advocate proliferation of nuclear weapons as favourable to peace—is plain.

But neo-realism as pure theory, a paradigm in the study of international relations, is one thing; the ideological discourse of American foreign policy, another. Through those portals, it cannot enter unaccompanied. Art does not escape this rule. Selective engagement, he explains, is a ‘*Realpolitik* plus’ strategy. What is the plus? The night in which all cows are black: ‘realism cum liberalism’. The first aims to ‘keep the United States secure and prosperous’; the second to ‘nudge the world towards the values the nation holds dear—democracy, free markets, human rights and international openness’.⁶⁶ The distinction between them

⁶⁵ Art seeks to distinguish ‘dominion’ from ‘primacy’. The former would indeed ‘create a global American imperium’ allowing the US to ‘impose its dictates on others’ and, he concedes, while ‘the US has never pursued a full-fledged policy of dominion’, since 1945 ‘semblances of it have appeared four times’: at the outset of the Cold War (undeclared roll-back); under Reagan; after the end of the Gulf War (the Defense Planning Guidance of 1992); and under the second Bush. ‘Dominion is a powerful temptation for a nation as strong as the United States.’ But it is impossible to achieve and any whiff of it is self-defeating. Primacy, on the other hand, is ‘superior influence’, not ‘absolute rule’. Nor is it a grand strategy, but simply that margin of extra military strength which makes the state that enjoys it the most influential actor at large: *A Grand Strategy*, pp. 87–92. But since, as Samuel Huntington once observed, there is by definition no such thing as absolute power in an inter-state system, the power of any state always being relative to that of others, the distinction between the two terms is inevitably porous.

⁶⁶ Art, *America’s Grand Strategy*, p. 235.

corresponds to the hierarchy of America's interests: realism secures what is vital, liberalism pursues what is only desirable. The latter is an add-on: Art's writing is overwhelmingly concerned with the former. But it is not mere adornment, without incidence on the structure of his conception as a whole. For the line between the vital and the desirable is inherently blurred, Art's own listings of the two fluctuating over time. 'International economic openness', the classic Open Door, is—realistically, one might say—ranked second out of (then) five top American interests in 'A Defensible Defense' (1991), only to be downgraded to fourth out of six in 'Geopolitics Updated' (1998), on the grounds that 90 per cent of US GDP is produced at home. In *A Grand Strategy for America* (2003), there is only one vital interest: defence of the homeland, and two highly important ones—peace in Eurasia and Gulf oil.⁶⁷ War should not be waged to further the promotion of democracy or protection of human rights (ranked without supporting reasons above global climate change)—but there will be exceptions, where military intervention to create democracy or restrain slaughter is required. Art admits, candidly enough, that selective engagement has its 'pitfalls', since unless care is taken, 'commitments can become open-ended', while himself falling in with the perfect example of just that—'staying the course' (to where?) in Afghanistan.⁶⁸ What is selective about a requirement for 'permanent forward operating bases' in East and South-East Asia, Europe, the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, eschewing 'in general' only South America and Africa?⁶⁹ The tell-tale formula, repeated more than once in explaining the merits of this version of grand strategy, informs Americans that US power-projection can 'shape events' and 'mould the environment' to 'make them more congenial to US interests'.⁷⁰ In the vagueness and vastness of this ambition, open-ended with a vengeance, realism dissolves itself into a potentially all-purpose justification of any of the adventures conducted in the name of liberalism.

⁶⁷ Art, *A Grand Strategy*, p. 46; *America's Grand Strategy*, pp. 190, 235, 237.

⁶⁸ Art, *America's Grand Strategy*, pp. 254, 379.

⁶⁹ Art, *America's Grand Strategy*, p. 374.

⁷⁰ Art, *America's Grand Strategy*, pp. 373, 235.

4. ECONOMY FIRST

Are there any significant constructions in the discourse of American foreign policy that escape its mandatory dyad? Perhaps, in its way, one. In background and aim Thomas P. M. Barnett belongs in the company of grand strategists, but in outlook is at an angle to them. Trained as a Sovietologist at Harvard, he taught at the Naval War College, worked in the Office of Force Transformation set up by Rumsfeld at the Pentagon, voted for Kerry and now directs a consultancy offering technical and financial connexions to the outside world in regions like Iraqi Kurdistan. *Great Powers: America and the World After Bush*, the product of this trajectory, is unlike anything else in the literature, in manner and in substance. In the breezy style of a salesman with an inexhaustible store of snappy slogans, it lays out a eupeptic, yet far from conventional, vision of globalization as the master-narrative for grasping the nature and future of US planetary power—one calculated to disconcert equally the *bien-pensant* platitudes of Clintonism, and their condemnation by critics like Brzezinski, in a triumphalism so confident it dispenses with a good many of its customary accoutrements.

America, Barnett's argument runs, has no cause for doubt or despondency in the aftermath of a war in Iraq that was well-intentioned, but hopelessly mismanaged. Its position is not slipping: 'This is still America's world.' For as the earth's first and most successful free-market economy and multi-ethnic political union, whose evolution prefigures that of humanity at large, 'we are modern globalization's source code—its DNA'. The implication? 'The United States isn't coming to a bad end but a good beginning—our American system successfully projected upon the world.'⁷¹ That projection, properly understood, neither involves nor requires US promotion of democracy at large. For Barnett, who declares himself without inhibition an economic determinist, it is capitalism that is the real revolutionary force spawned by America, whose expansion renders unnecessary attempts to introduce parliaments and elections around the world. The Cold War was won by using US military strength to buy time for Western economic superiority over the Soviet Union to do its work. So too in the post-Cold War era,

⁷¹ Thomas P. M. Barnett, *Great Powers: America and the World After Bush*, New York 2009, pp. 1–2, 4.

peace comes before justice: if the US is willing to go slow in its political demands on regions that neither know nor accept liberal democracy, while getting its way on economic demands of them, it will see the realization of its ideals within them in due course. 'America needs to ask itself: is it more important to make globalization truly global, while retaining great-power peace and defeating whatever anti-globalization insurgencies may appear in the decades ahead? Or do we tether our support for globalization's advance to the upfront demand that the world first resembles us politically?'⁷²

So today it is not a league of democracies that is called for, but a league of capitalist powers, committed to making the order of capital workable on a world stage, rebranded along Lincoln lines as a 'team of rivals' comprising China and Russia along with Japan, Europe, India, Brazil. Americans have no reason to balk at the inclusion of either of their former adversaries in the Cold War. It took the United States half a century after its revolution to develop a popular multi-party democracy, even then excluding women and slaves, and it protected its industries for another century beyond that. China is closing the distance between it and America with the methods of Hamilton and Clay, though it now needs regulatory reforms like those of the Progressive Era (as does contemporary Wall Street). Its nationalist foreign policy already resembles that of the first Roosevelt. As for Russia, with its economic brutalism and crude materialism, its mixture of raw individualism and collective chauvinism, it is in its Gilded Age—and there will be plenty of other versions of its younger self America is going to bump up against, who may not take it at its own estimation: 'Moscow pragmatically sees America for what it truly is right now: militarily overextended, financially overdrawn and ideologically overwrought.' But its anti-Americanism is largely for show. In view of Russia's past, the US could scarcely ask for a better partner than Putin, whose regime is nationalist, like that of China, but not expansionist. 'Neither represents a systemic threat, because each supports globalization's advance, and so regards the world's dangers much as we do', with no desire to challenge the dominant liberal trade order, merely to extract maximum selfish benefit from it.⁷³ The varieties of capitalism these and other rising contenders represent are one of its assets as a system, allowing experiments and offsets in its forms that can only strengthen it.

⁷² Barnett, *Great Powers*, p. 30.

⁷³ Barnett, *Great Powers*, pp. 184–5, 227–31.

Between the advanced core and the more backward zones of the world, a historic gap remains to be overcome. But a capitalist domino effect is already at work. In that sense, 'Africa will be a knock-off of India, which is a knock-off of China, which is a knock-off of South Korea, which is a knock-off of Japan, which half a century ago was developed by us as a knock-off of the United States. Call it globalization's "six degrees of replication".'⁷⁴ But if economically speaking, 'history really has "ended"', transition across the gap is going to generate unprecedented social turmoil, as traditional populations are uprooted and customary ways of life destroyed before middle-class prosperity arrives. Religion will always be the most important bridge across the gap, as a way of coping with that tumult, and as globalization spreads, it is logical that there should be the greatest single religious awakening in history, because it is bringing the most sweeping changes in economic conditions ever known. In this churning, the more mixed and multi-cultural societies become, the more individuals, in the absence of a common culture, cling to their religious identity. There too, America in its multi-cultural patterns of faith is the leading edge of a universal process.

What of the war-zone where Barnett himself has been involved? For all the spurious pretexts advanced for it, the decision to invade Iraq was not irrational: however mismanaged, it has shaken up the stagnation of the Middle East, and begun to reconnect the region with the pull of globalization. By contrast, the war in Afghanistan is a dead-end, only threatening further trouble with Pakistan. Bush's greatest failure was that he got nothing from Iran for toppling its two Sunni enemies, Saddam and the Taliban, and persisted—in deference to Saudi and Israeli pressure—in trying to contain rather than co-opt it. So it is no surprise that the mullahs have concluded nuclear weapons would keep them safe from US attempts to topple them too. In that they are absolutely right. Iran should be admitted to the nuclear club, since the only way to stop it acquiring a capability would be to use nuclear weapons against it—conventional bombing would not do the trick. Needed in the Middle East is not a futile attack on Iran by Israel or America, but a regional security system which the big Asian powers, China and India, both more dependent on Gulf oil than America, cooperate with the US to enforce, and Iran—the only country in the region where governments can be voted out of office—plays the part to which its size and culture entitle it.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Barnett, *Great Powers*, p. 248.

⁷⁵ Barnett, *Great Powers*, pp. 10–11, 26–7.

For the rest, by raising the bar so high against great power wars, US military force has been a huge gift to humanity. But the latter-day Pentagon needs to cut its overseas troop strength by at least a quarter and possibly a third. For Barnett, who lectured to Petraeus and Schoomaker, the future of counter-insurgency lies in the novel model of AFRICOM, which unlike the Pentagon's other area commands—Central, Pacific, European, Northern, Southern—maintains a light-footprint network of 'contingency operating locations' in Africa, combining military vigilance with civilian assistance: 'imperialism to some, but nothing more than a pistol-packing Peace Corps to me'.⁷⁶ Chinese investment will do more to help close the gap in the Dark Continent, but AFRICOM is playing its part too.

In the larger scene, American obsessions with terrorism, democracy and nuclear weapons are all irrelevances. What matters is the vast unfolding of a globalization that resembles the internet as defined by one of its founders: 'Nobody owns it, everybody uses it, and anybody can add services to it.' The two now form a single process. Just as globalization becomes 'a virtual Helsinki Accords for everyone who logs on', so WikiLeaks is—this from a planner fresh from the Defense Department—'the Radio Free Europe of the surveillance age'.⁷⁷ To join up, there is no requirement that a society be an electoral democracy, reduce its carbon emissions or desist from sensible protection of its industries. The rules for membership are simply: 'come as you are and come when you can'. As the middle class swells to half the world's population by 2020, America need have no fear of losing its pre-eminence. So long as it remains the global economy's leading risk-taker, 'there will never be a post-American world. Just a post-Caucasian one'.⁷⁸

Topped and tailed with a poem by Lermontov as epigraph and a tribute to H. G. Wells for envoi, as an exercise in grand strategy *Great Powers* is, in its way, no less exotic than *God and Gold*. The two can be taken as book-ends to the field. Where Mead's construction marries realism and idealism à l'américaine in a paroxysmic union, Barnett side-steps their embrace, without arriving—at least formally—at very different conclusions. In his conception of American power in the new century, though he tips his hat to the President, the Wilsonian strain is close to zero. Even the 'liberal international order' is more a token than a touchstone,

⁷⁶ Barnett, *Great Powers*, pp. 286–9.

⁷⁷ Barnett, *Great Powers*, pp. 301, 318.

⁷⁸ Barnett, *Great Powers*, pp. 413, 251.

since in his usage it makes no case of economic protection. If, in their local meanings, idealism is all but absent, elements of realism are more visible. Theodore Roosevelt—not only the youngest, but ‘the most broadly accomplished and experienced individual ever to serve as president’—is singled out as the great transformer of American politics, both at home and abroad, and Kagan’s *Dangerous Nation* saluted as the work that set Barnett thinking of ways in which he could connect Americans to globalization through their own history. But the cheerful welcome *Great Powers* extends to the autocracies of China and Russia as younger versions of the United States itself is at the antipodes of Kagan. Treatment of Putin is enough to make Brzezinski’s hair stand on end. Ready acceptance of Iranian nuclear weapons crosses a red line for Art.

Such iconoclasm is not simply a matter of temperament, though it is clearly also that—it is no surprise the Naval War College felt it could do without Barnett’s services. It is because the underlying problematic has so little to do with the role of military force, where the realist tradition has principally focused, or even economic expansion, as a nationalist drive. The twist that takes it out of conventional accounts of American exceptionalism, while delivering a maximized version of it, is its reduction of the country’s importance in the world to the pure principle of capitalism—supplier of the genetic code of a globalization that does not depend on, nor require, the Fourteen Points or the Atlantic Charter, but simply the power of the market and of mass consumption, with a modicum of force to put down such opponents as it may arouse. In its unfazed economic determinism, the result is not unlike a materialist variant, from the other side of the barricades, of the vision of America in Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*. That empire in its more traditional sense, which they repudiate, has not entirely fled the scene in *Great Powers*, its paean to the Africa Command makes plain. There, the footprints are ever more frequent. Created only in 2007, AFRICOM now deploys US military effectives in 49 out of 55 countries of the continent.⁷⁹ Not America rules the world—the world becomes America. Such is the message, taken straight, of *Great Powers*. In the interim, there is less distinction between the two than prospectus suggests.

⁷⁹ See the striking documentation by Nick Turse, ‘The Pivot to Africa’, *TomDispatch.com*, 5 September 2013.

II

An alternative economic vision, at once antithesis and coda, more traditional in outlook yet more *à la page* in the second Obama Administration, is since available. *The Resurgence of the West* (2013) by Richard Rosecrance—Harvard Kennedy School, tour of duty on the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department—takes as its starting-point American economic decline relative to the rise of China or India. These are societies still benefiting from the transfer of labour from agriculture to industry or services and the import of foreign technology, which permit very fast growth. The US, like every other mature economy with a middle-class population, cannot hope to sustain comparable rates. But by forging a transatlantic union with Europe, it could compensate spatially for what it is losing temporally, with the creation of a market more than twice the size of the US, commanding over half of global GDP—an enlargement unleashing higher investment and growth, and creating an incomparable economic force in the world. For though tariffs between the US and EU are now low, there are plenty of non-tariff barriers—above all, in services and foodstuffs—whose abolition would dynamize both. Moreover a customs union, with linkage of the two currencies, would have as chastening an effect on other powers as Nixon’s freeing of the dollar from gold once had, in the days of Treasury Secretary Connally.⁸⁰

Outsourcing to low-wage Asian countries—satisfactory enough to US corporations today, but not to the US state, which cannot lay off citizens as they can workers, and risks punishment if jobs disappear—would dwindle, and the inbuilt advantage of the West’s high-technology and scientific clusters would come fully into their own. China, more dependent than any other great power on raw materials and markets abroad, with a manufacturing base largely consisting of links in production chains beginning and ending elsewhere, would be in no position to challenge such a transatlantic giant—possibly transpacific too, were Japan to join it. Nor would the benefits of a Western Union be confined to the United States and Europe. Historically, hegemonic transitions always carried the risks of wars between ascending and descending powers, and today many are fearful that China could prove a Wilhelmine Germany

⁸⁰ Richard Rosecrance, *The Resurgence of the West: How a Transatlantic Union Can Prevent War and Restore the United States and Europe*, New Haven 2013, p. 79.

to America's Edwardian England. But the lesson of history is also that peace is best assured, not by a precarious balance of power—it was that which led to the First World War—but by an overbalance of power, deterring all prospect of challenging it, attracting instead others to join it. Rejuvenating the West, a Euro-American compact would create just that: 'The possibility of an enduring overbalance of power lies before us. It needs only to be seized upon.' Moreover, once in place, 'overweening power can act as a magnet'.⁸¹ Indeed, who is to say that China could itself not one day join a TAFTA, assuring everlasting peace?

With a low view of European economic and demographic health, the vision of any kind of TAFTA as an open sesame to restoration of American fortunes is an object for derision in *Great Powers*: 'Whenever I hear an American politician proclaim the need to strengthen the Western alliance, I know that leader promises to steer by our historical wake instead of crafting a forward-looking strategy. Recapturing past glory is not recapturing our youth but denying our parentage of this world we inhabit so uneasily today.'⁸² Europeans are pensioners in it. It would be wrong to reject them, but pointless to look to them. After all, Barnett remarks kindly, on the freeway of globalization granddad can come along for the ride, whoever is sitting in the front seat next to the driver.

⁸¹ Rosecrance, *Resurgence of the West*, pp. 108, 163, 173, 175.

⁸² Barnett, *Great Powers*, p. 369.

5. OUTSIDE THE CASTLE

The driver remains American. The discourses of foreign policy since the time of Clinton return to a common set of themes confronting the nation: the disorders of the homeland, the menace of terrorism, the rise of powers in the East. Diagnoses of the degree of danger these represent for the United States vary—Mead or Kagan sanguine, Mandelbaum or Kupchan concerned, Brzezinski alarmist. What does not change, though its expressions vary, is the axiomatic value of American leadership. The hegemony of the United States continues to serve both the particular interests of the nation and the universal interests of humanity. Certainly, it needs adjustment to the hour, and on occasion has been mishandled. But of its benefits to the world there can be no serious question. The American Way of Life, it is true, can no longer be held up for imitation with the confidence of Henry Luce seventy years ago. Ailments at home and missteps abroad have made it less persuasive. But if the classic affirmative versions of the blessings of American power now have to be qualified, without being abandoned, its negative legitimation is propounded ever more strenuously. The primacy of the US may at times grate on others, even with cause, but who could doubt the alternative to it would be far worse? Without American hegemony, global disorder—war, genocide, depression, famine—would fatally ensue. In the last resort, the peace and security of the planet depend on it. Admiration of it is no longer necessary; simply, acceptance *um schlimmeres zu vermeiden*.

That, in one way or another, it is in need of repair is the premise of virtually all this literature. The bill of particulars for internal reform is repeated with relentless regularity in one writer after another: inequality has got out of hand, the school system is failing, health-care is too expensive, infrastructure is out of date, energy is wasted, R&D is insufficient, labour is under-skilled, finance is under-regulated, entitlements are out of control, the budget is in the red, the political system is overly polarized. Needed, all but invariably, is a 'centrist' agenda: increasing investment in science and human capital, improvements in transport and communications, cost control in health-care, fiscal restraint, more realistic claims on social security, energy conservation, urban renewal, etc. The menu may be ignored—it largely is by Kagan or Barnett—but rarely, if ever, is it outright rejected.

Remedies for external setbacks or oncoming hazards are more divisive. The Republican Administration of 2000–08, more controversial than its predecessor, enjoyed the support of Kagan throughout, Mead and Barnett at first, while incurring criticism, much of it vehement, from Ikenberry and Kupchan, Art and Brzezinski. In the wake of it, the refrain is universal that in the interests of American primacy itself, more consideration should be given to the feelings of allies and aliens than Bush and Cheney were willing to show, if legitimacy is to be restored. Multilateralism is the magic word for Wilsonians, but after their fashion harder cases pay their respects to the same requirement—Kagan calls for greater tact in handling Europeans, Mead for a ‘diplomacy of civilizations’ in dealing with Islam, Art wants American hegemony to ‘look more benign’, Fukuyama urges ‘at least a rhetorical concern for the poor and the excluded’.⁸³

Democracy, on the other hand, its spread till yesterday an irrenounceable goal of any self-respecting diplomacy, is now on the back burner. Openly discarded as a guideline by Kupchan, Barnett and Brzezinski, downgraded by Art, matter for horticulture rather than engineering for Mandelbaum, only Ikenberry and Kagan look wistfully for a league of democracies to right the world. The zone where America sought most recently to introduce it has been discouraging. But while few express much satisfaction with US performance in the Middle East, none proposes any significant change of American dispositions in it. For all, without exception, military control of the Gulf is a *sine qua non* of US global power. Ties with Israel remain a crucial ‘national interest’ even for Art; Brzezinski alone permitting himself a discreet grumble at the excessive leverage of Tel Aviv in Washington. The most daring solution for resolving the Palestinian question is to iron-clad the bantustans on offer under Clinton—demilitarized fragments of a quarter of the former Mandate, leaving all major Jewish settlements in place—with American troops to back up the IDF, and signature of a formal defence treaty with Israel. If Iran refuses to obey Western instructions to halt its nuclear programme, it will—no-one, of course welcomes the prospect—in *extremis* have to be attacked, hopefully with a helping hand or a friendly wink

⁸³ Mead: *God and Gold*, pp. 378 ff. Art: ‘The task for US leaders is a tough one: to make the United States look more benign and yet at the same time advance America’s national interests by employing the considerable power the nation wields’, *America’s Grand Strategy*, p. 381. Fukuyama: ‘Soft Talk, Big Stick’, in Leffler and Legro, eds, *To Lead the World*, p. 215.

from Moscow and Beijing. Only Barnett breaks the taboo that protects the Israeli nuclear monopoly in the name of non-proliferation.

How is American domination to be preserved in the arena of *Weltpolitik* proper—the domain of the great powers and their conflicts, actual or potential? The European Union is the least contentious of these since it evidently poses no threat to US hegemony. Ikenberry and Kupchan piously, Art impassively, Brzezinski and Kagan contemptuously, underline or recall the need for Western cohesion, for which Rosecrance proposes a sweeping institutional form. Japan still safely a ward of the US, and India not yet a leading player, it is Russia and China that are the major apples of discord. In each case, the field divides between advocates of containment and apostles of co-option. Brzezinski would not only pinion Russia between one American castellation in Europe, and another in China, but ideally break the country up altogether. For Mandelbaum, on the other hand, the expansion of NATO to Russia's borders is a gratuitous provocation that can only rebound against the West, while Kupchan hopes to embrace Russia itself within NATO. For Kagan, China and Russia alike are hostile regimes, well aware of Western hopes to turn or undermine them, that can only be dealt with by demonstration of superior strength. For Mandelbaum and Ikenberry, on the contrary, China is the great prize whose adhesion to the liberal international order is increasingly plausible, and will render it irreversible, while for Barnett, with his more relaxed conception of such an order, the PRC is to all intents and purposes already in the bag. Art is willing to concede it a swathe of predominance from North-East to South-East Asia—provided the US continues to rule the waves in the Pacific. Brzezinski, after first imagining China as, *par pouvoir interposé*, a forward base of America to encircle Russia from the east, now envisages Russia encircling China from the north.

II

In such counsels of the time, three features are most striking. For all the attention they now pay to domestic woes, quite new in a discourse of foreign policy, salience of concern never transcends superficiality of treatment. On the underlying causes of the long slow-down in the growth of output, median income and productivity, and concomitant rise of public, corporate and household debt, not only in the US but across the

advanced capitalist world, there is not a line of enquiry or reflection. In this community, the work of those who have explored them—Brenner, Duncan, Duménil and Lévy, Aglietta—is a closed book. No doubt it would be unreasonable to expect specialists in international relations to be familiar with the work of economic historians. In ignorance of them, however, the roots of the decline so many deplore and seek to remedy remain invisible.

These are internal affairs. The external counsels, naturally far more copious and ambitious, are of a different order. There professional commitment is far from barren. To the task of redressing the present position of the country at large, and imagining the future of the world, passion and ingenuity continue to be brought. Arresting, however, is the fantastical nature of the constructions to which these again and again give rise. Gigantic rearrangements of the chessboard of Eurasia, vast countries moved like so many castles or pawns across it; elongations of NATO to the Bering Straits; the PLA patrolling the derricks of Aramco; Leagues of Democracy sporting Mubarak and Ben Ali; a *Zollverein* from Moldova to Oregon, if not to Kobe; the End of History as the Peace of God. In the all but complete detachment from reality of so many of these—even the most prosaic, the Western Union of US and EU, lacking so much as a line on the political means of its realization—it is difficult not to see a strain of unconscious desperation, as if the only way to restore American leadership to the plenitude of its merits and powers in this world, for however finite a span of time, is to imagine another one altogether.

Finally, and most decisively, to the luxuriance of schemes for the transmogrification of its foes and friends alike corresponds the dearth of any significant ideas for a retraction of the imperium itself. Not withdrawal, but adjustment, is the common bottom line. Of the adjustments under way—further tentacles in Africa, Central Asia and Australia; assassinations from the air at presidential will; universal surveillance; cyber-warfare—little is ever said. Those who speak of them belong elsewhere. ‘In international politics’, Christopher Layne has written, ‘benevolent hegemons are like unicorns—there is no such animal. Hegemons love themselves, but others mistrust and fear them—and for good reason.’⁸⁴ The tradition of foreign-policy dissent in the US that he represents is alive and well. Like its counterpart in imperial Britain of

⁸⁴ Layne, *Peace of Illusions*, p. 142.

old, it remains, as it has always been, marginal in national debate, and invisible in the affairs of the state, but no less penetrating for that. It is there that genuine realism, understood not as a stance in inter-state relations, or a theory about them, but as an ability to look at realities without self-deception, and describe them without euphemism, is to be found. The names of Johnson, Bacevich, Layne, Calleo, not to speak of Kolko or Chomsky, are those to honour. The title of Chalmers Johnson's last book, which calls for the closing down of the CIA and the myriad bases of the Pentagon, can stand for the sense of their work, and an hour as distant as ever: *Dismantling the Empire*.