

American Grand Strategy

The Imperial Logic of Bush's Liberal Agenda

Edward Rhodes

with responses by **Owen Harries, Allan Gyngell, Peter Jennings, Coral Bell** and **David Flint**

The United States and its allies are engaged in a difficult and controversial struggle in Iraq. This intervention, the Bush administration has made clear, is a logical consequence of its larger vision of America's role in the world. Proclaiming freedom as the natural birthright of every person, and arguing that progress toward reclaiming this birthright can best be made in the protective shadow of America's global military power, the president has made a powerful case for liberal imperialism. Yet this righteous pursuit of human liberty and international order misunderstands the nature of both liberalism and what threatens it, and risks undermining not only America's own liberal republican values but also international institutions.

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As the United States and its British ally mobilised for war, elite and public attention in America, Europe and Australia tended to focus on the immediate question of whether to undertake military action against Iraq. Proponents of war underscored the dangers of leaving Saddam Hussein in power. Opponents stressed the morality, military risks and international political costs of undertaking a preventive war, the possibilities of containing Saddam Hussein's influence and deterring his use of weapons of mass destruction without resort to war, and the difficulties of building stable political institutions after a victory.

The cases for and against war were thus made largely in terms of the specifics of the Iraqi situation—whether, or under what circumstances, Saddam Hussein would use weapons of mass destruction; whether a democratic alternative to Saddam Hussein existed; whether the Iraqi people would welcome an American-led invasion; and whether military action would create an anti-American backlash and destabilise the region's conservative and pro-American regimes or, conversely, spur a process of peaceful democratic development across the region.

These were—and are—important and interesting questions. A narrow focus on the particulars of the Iraqi situation, however, is as dangerous as it is natural. Even in the press of the moment, it is imperative to think long and hard about the overarching American foreign policy vision and American grand strategy that provide the intellectual justification not only for America's Iraq policy but also for America's wider, politically and militarily assertive, engagement with nations around the globe. Such an evaluation demands we consider carefully the world America seeks to create and how the United States proposes to create it.

The return to Wilsonian internationalism

To its credit, the Bush administration has made its foreign policy conception quite clear. In his 1 June 2002 address at West Point (WP), President George W. Bush laid out his administration's conceptual framework for dealing with the post-September 11 world.¹ This framework was

fleshed out in greater detail in the administration's National Security Strategy (NSS) issued three months later.² These are documents that should be read and pondered with care.

The West Point address offers a lucid and powerful account of the Bush administration's vision of America and America's role in the world. The speech evokes American values, argues the universality of human liberty and attacks what it describes as the twin dangers of tyrants and terrorism. It rejects the murkiness of moral relativism, distinguishes boldly between good and evil, and unhesitatingly aligns America on the side of good.

America, the president insists, has a global duty. Both to protect itself and to be true to its higher calling, America must shoulder the responsibility of constructing a global peace, which can be built only on the foundation of individual human liberty and free societies. The might and will of the United States must be mustered and employed not simply to maintain a balance of power that holds aggressors in check but to create 'a balance of power'—or, more accurately, an imbalance of power—'that favors human freedom' (NSS, p.i).

At West Point the president thus proclaimed his faith that a new world order based on liberalism's cherished values is both necessary and possible. This new liberal order will not construct itself, however. American power will be key in building it. More specifically, American *military* power will be key. Order—even a liberal order based on human liberty and on consent—ultimately requires the exercise of power, and in this case the power will need to be America's military might. Addressing the nation's newly commissioned military officers, the president was blunt about the purposes to which American military and political power would be put:

Wherever we carry it, the American flag will stand not only for our power, but for freedom. Our nation's cause has always been larger than our nation's defense. We fight, as we always fight, for a just peace—a peace that favors human liberty. We will defend the peace against threats from terrorists and tyrants . . . And we will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on

every continent. Building this just peace is America's opportunity, and America's duty. (WP, p.2)

This is Wilsonianism with a vengeance. The objective of American foreign policy, President Bush makes clear, is nothing less than a transformation of world politics, domestic as well as international, using American power—military as well as economic and political—to build liberal societies and polities.

We are, President Bush suggests, at a great watershed in human history, like the one at the end of the Thirty Years War. Then, from the nightmare of uncontrolled warring, pillage, rapine and disease emerged a new political order, based on sovereign states able to control and limit violence. Today, in the wake of a 20th century of violence between these sovereign states—a First World War that pitted liberal democracy against authoritarianism, a Second World War that pitted it against fascism and militarism, and a Cold War that pitted it against communism—new political institutions and a new political order can and must be created. 'We have', the president notes, 'our best chance since the rise of the nation state in the 17th century to build a world where the great powers compete in peace instead of prepare for war' (WP, p.4). 'The United States will', he declares, 'use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe' (NSS, p.ii). 'Freedom', the president goes on to proclaim

is the non-negotiable demand of human dignity; the birthright of every person—in every civilization . . . Throughout history, freedom has been threatened by war and terror; it has been challenged by the dashing of wills of powerful states and the evil designs of tyrants; and it has been tested by widespread disease and poverty. Today, humanity holds in its hands the opportunity to further freedom's triumph over all these foes. The United States welcomes our responsibility to lead in this great mission. (NSS, p.iii)

Although President Bush denies harbouring either 'Utopian' or 'imperial' ambitions, he embraces the view that, under American guidance, a world

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free from violence and strife is indeed possible. 'Competition between great nations is inevitable', the president notes, 'but armed conflict in our world is not' (WP, p.4).

How is America to achieve this goal? Again, the president is perfectly clear. The achievement of a peaceful, liberal world order requires not simply American power, and not simply American military power, but a global American military hegemony. At West Point he declared, 'America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge—thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace' (p.4). It is America's unchallengeable military power that provides the aegis under which peace and freedom can be built. The new world order is possible because America's global military power allows it to dictate the rules of international discourse and the means by which political actors can adjudicate their differences. Appeals to force by 'sovereign' states or other political actors will be bootless. American military supremacy will be so manifest that even the thought of challenging it (and the American-imposed order constructed atop it) will be seen as implausible.

The National Security Strategy returns to this theme of America's military hegemony, developing it more fully and explicitly. 'It is', the president announced,

time to reaffirm the essential role of American military strength. We must build and maintain our defenses beyond challenge . . . We know from history that deterrence can fail; and we know from experience that some enemies cannot be deterred. The United States must and will maintain the capability to defeat any attempt by an enemy—whether a state or

a non-state actor—to impose its will on the United States, our allies, or our friends. We will maintain the forces sufficient to support our obligations, and to defend freedom. Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States. (NSS, pp.29, 30)

Three extraordinary features in the Bush administration's conception of American military hegemony deserve to be underscored. The first is that American military power will have to be used aggressively, not passively. The 'best defense is a good offense', the National Security Strategy notes (p.6). America's military is not simply a protective shell, but also a fist. This fist will be used to strike down freedom's foes. More to the point, it will be used pro-actively, not simply reactively. Though the ultimate political goal is the *defence* of humanity's natural right to freedom, the United States will not hesitate to act in a militarily offensive fashion, striking enemies before they can endanger the United States, the free world, or the American interest in a liberal world order.

The administration's Iraq policy would seem to offer a clear (though, to date, also the *only*) example of this new American willingness to use military force aggressively and preventively to remove obstacles to the creation of a global liberal society. It is, in many ways, a revealing illustration of the complicated relationship between the Bush administration's foreign policy agenda and the need to use force pro-actively. While the case for preventive war always hinged at least in part on

the potential threat that an Iraqi nuclear arsenal would pose to the American homeland, the greater problem for American policymakers has been the threat that such an arsenal would pose to America's efforts to build a stable, peaceful, pro-American, and eventually liberal Middle East. Arguably, it is precisely America's liberal agenda—its commitment to extend the American vision of freedom across the globe—that brings America into conflict with rogue states and terrorists, makes impossible the types of *realpolitik* balancing and containment policies that the United States at times in the past pursued in regions like the Persian Gulf, and forces the United States to move preventatively against the most powerful of these illiberal actors.

In any case, as the president explains,

Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today's threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries' choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first . . . The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. (NSS, p.15)

To be sure, none of this implies that America will use military power automatically or unthinkingly, that it will turn first to military means when other tools of persuasion are available, or even that it will necessarily choose to use its military fist when other means of dealing with freedom's enemies prove ineffectual. Presumably, in most cases the mere fact of America's military hegemony will be sufficient to establish a penumbra of peace under which liberalism will flourish and, eventually, liberalism's enemies will wither.

In some cases, though, such patience may be impossible or ill-advised. The president has stressed

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that the most critical danger for America and the liberal world arises when tyrants or terrorists come together with weapons of mass destruction—the greatest danger lies ‘at the crossroads of radicalism and technology (NSS, p.ii)’—and it is in these situations when America is most likely to act preventively. Although the record (particularly America’s long, cautious, diplomatic *pavane* with North Korea) suggests that even in these cases the United States will not necessarily rush to a military judgment, the president is clear that in the end the United States will use its military force and will do so preventively, before ‘the enemies of civilisation’ are able to pose a threat to the United States, its allies, or its friends (NSS, pp.14-15). His prose is uncompromising, suggesting an implicit parallel between today’s world and that of the 1930s, when the liberal democracies allowed Nazi power to grow unchecked:

as a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed. We cannot defend America and our friends by hoping for the best. So we must be prepared to defeat our enemies’ plans, using the best intelligence and proceeding with deliberation. History will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act. In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action. (NSS, p.ii)

Second, the National Security Strategy makes plain that the liberal order the United States aims to create will, ultimately, rest on American military hegemony, not on the combined will and might of the liberal world. American military power, not that of a liberal coalition, is what will guarantee peace, security and human freedom around the world. Consensus is desirable, but it is not necessary. Because the global liberal order is essential not only to the world’s safety but also to America’s safety, America’s sovereign responsibilities supersede its commitment to international institutions. ‘While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense’ (NSS, p.6).

Third, the National Security Strategy makes clear that the Bush administration proposes to use American military hegemony not simply aggressively and unilaterally, but globally. In the Bush administration’s thinking, a world order cannot endure permanently half illiberal and half free. The imperative to spread liberalism’s freedom throughout the world rests not simply on the fact that freedom is every human’s right. It rests also on the fact that the absence of freedom, even in places as remote as Afghanistan, poses a danger to the rest of humanity. For this reason, American military forces will be deployed globally—not simply in the industrialised, liberal world of North America, Europe and northeast Asia. During the Cold War, the American military presence helped provide security and encourage liberal development in the free world. Now it will do the same for the whole world.

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It does not seem unreasonable to describe a policy that proposes to use military supremacy aggressively, unilaterally and universally in order to encourage and, in such cases as Iraq, to attempt to impose a particular form of governance as ‘imperial’. One must quickly add the additional adjective ‘liberal’: the Bush administration’s grand strategy may be imperial, but it aims at creating liberal, rather than autocratic or totalitarian, governance wherever the American military *pax* reaches. The tension between these two adjectives, ‘imperial’ and ‘liberal’, lies at the heart of the Bush administration’s foreign policy, though it is nowhere addressed.

The new world order will be constructed not only under the beneficial umbrella of America’s global military dominance but also on the basis of America’s blueprint and on the basis of its conceptions of universal values and of order:

The 20th century ended with a single surviving model of human progress,

based on non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women and private property and free speech and equal justice and religious tolerance . . . When it comes to the common rights and needs of men and women, there is no clash of civilizations. The requirements of freedom apply fully to Africa and Latin America and the entire Islamic world. The peoples of the Islamic nations want and deserve the same freedoms and opportunities as people in every nation. And their governments should listen to them. (WP, pp.4-5)

For America, interests and values are not in tension: what is good for America is also good for the world, and making the world safe for America will make the world a better place.

Bush goes on to acknowledge that ‘America cannot impose this vision’. He does, however, argue that American power broadly understood should be used to move the world towards it: ‘we can support and reward governments that make the right choices for their own people. In our development aid, in our diplomatic efforts, in our international broadcasting, and in our educational assistance, the United States will promote moderation and tolerance and human rights’. He also implies that American power—including America’s military tools—should be used to create the conditions around the world that are associated with creating a peaceful, liberal, all-embracing world order. ‘We will’, he bluntly states, ‘defend the peace that makes all progress possible’ (WP, p.5).

There is much here with which most Americans can probably agree. Peace is a praiseworthy goal. Freedom and human rights are good. These are, in the end, achievable. The world is not, as realists would have it, one in which international life is inevitably nasty, brutish and short, ruled by

power rather than by justice. For most Americans, who like the president prefer to look at the world through liberal lenses, this is familiar and comforting.

Indeed, in two important ways the president taps into the deep liberal vein running through American history and the American psyche. First, he appeals to American beliefs that there is, and always has been, something special about America’s role in the world. For America, interests and values are not in tension: what is good for America is also good for the world, and making the world safe for America will make the world a better place. Second, he appeals to Americans’ liberal faith in progress. ‘The US national security strategy’, he assures the American people,

will be based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests. The aim of this strategy is to help make the world not just safer but better. Our goals on the path to progress are clear: political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity. (NSS, p.1)

The reality of rhetoric

Of course, American foreign policy as practised typically turns out to be less ambitious and less radical than one would expect from presidential statements and official pronouncements. Despite his rhetoric about the ‘evil empire’, for example, Ronald Reagan’s policies never moved far outside the mainstream of America’s Cold War containment strategy. In the case of the current Bush administration, one can be reasonably confident that war against Iraq will not necessarily be followed by military operations against other members of the ‘axis of evil’. The power of circumstance, the constraints of resources and the prudence of political calculations will set practical limits on the Bush administration’s efforts to create a global liberal empire.

But this does not mean that rhetoric can be dismissed as irrelevant or unimportant. Rhetoric is the legitimising template that shapes how foreign policy debates are framed and determines which arguments are accepted as legitimate or plausible. In the case of the Bush administration’s policies

towards Iraq, the president's verbal embrace of a Wilsonian vision of global democratisation empowered those voices both inside and outside the administration that counselled vigorous action. The administration's foreign policy conception of what was necessary for a secure global order and America's role in building such an order opened the door both to arguments that the existence of a brutal tyrant in a critical region ultimately endangered American security and to arguments that bringing democracy to Iraq and, through knock-on effects, encouraging democratisation and liberalisation across the Arab world were important aims. Were it not for Saddam's determination to acquire weapons of mass destruction, these democratic imperialists would have had little chance of seeing their agenda implemented. The administration's rhetoric, however, framed how Saddam's behaviour was understood, how America's stakes were defined and how America's possible responses were evaluated.

Like Wilson before him, President Bush has expressed a willingness to enter into a covenant with power to achieve America's vision of a liberal world. Indeed, what is perhaps most striking about the grand strategy outlined by the president is that it is conceived in terms of a moral imperative. 'Responsibility' and 'obligation' figure alongside 'opportunity' in justifying the choices the president proposes America make (NSS, p.1). At this historic watershed, when the 'great struggle' that arrayed 'destructive totalitarian visions versus freedom and equality' is over, and 'the militant visions of class, nation, and race which promised Utopia and delivered misery have been defeated and discredited' (NSS, p.1), America's power imposes on it a moral duty. America's strategic choices at this juncture are dictated by this calling:

The United States possesses unprecedented—and unequalled—strength and influence in the world. Sustained by faith in the principles of liberty, and the value of a free society, this position comes with unparalleled responsibilities, obligations, and opportunity. The great strength of this

nation must be used to promote a balance of power that favors freedom. (NSS, p.1)

Bush goes on to argue that this calling—this obligation 'to defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere'—must represent the foundation for American national security policies. 'The national security strategy', he asserts, 'must start from these core beliefs and look outward for possibilities to expand liberty' (NSS, p.3). Note that the obligation Bush sees is not simply to defend liberty and justice in America and in other nations where they are currently enjoyed, but to extend freedom's blessings to those who have been denied this birthright. There is no suggestion that this is exclusively or even predominantly a task for American *military* power, yet this mission of expanding the zone of liberty nonetheless represents the heart of national security strategy. The preservation of America's unchallenged military hegemony is an essential prerequisite for the global political transformation envisioned; in those circumstances where the seriousness or immediacy of the threat posed by freedom's potential foes makes it appropriate, military force is one of the available tools.

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While America's power imposes a special responsibility, Bush makes clear that the moral duty to defend and extend liberalism knows no borders. Societies and states are not free to eschew liberalism. All societies and all states have a moral duty not only to embrace liberalism themselves, but also to ensure that individuals in other societies and states are free to enjoy its blessings. Sovereignty offers no shield or excuse: 'no nation owns these aspirations, and no nation is exempt from them' (NSS, p.3). Since the 'values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society', it follows that 'the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common

calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages' (NSS, p.1).

The president appears aware that the course he has charted is significantly different from the one steered by his predecessors. Indeed, the moral and prudential case made at West Point and in the NSS for aggressive, preventive action to destroy tyrants and terrorism around the world, like the decision to place America's duty 'to expand liberty' at the centre of national security strategy, represents a reversal of, or at least a dramatic departure from, the position he himself took during the 2000 election campaign.³ The president now makes the case that it is necessary to break with the past, arguing not only against any inward turn towards isolationism but also against a continuation of Cold War-era policies of containment and deterrence:

For much of the last century, America's defense relied on the Cold War doctrines of deterrence and containment. In some cases, those strategies still apply. But new threats also require new thinking. Deterrence—the promise of massive retaliation against nations—means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend. Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies. (WP, p.3)

A liberal world free from tyranny and terror may—and hopefully will—come, but it will not come soon, nor will it come as an act of American will.

A dissent

This vision of America and America's role in the world woefully misunderstands the power that would be required to do what it proclaims it is America's mission to do. Ridding the world of tyrants and terrorists is not simply a matter of surgical air strikes and guided munitions, of eliminating particular leaders and destroying particular facilities, of employing superior technology and military science. Ridding the

world of tyrants and terrorists is a matter of transforming lives and societies around the world. It is a process inseparable from great, long-term, historical developments in culture and economics. Strike down one tyrant or one terrorist and another will grow in his or her place, unless the environmental niche that allows them to flourish is altered.

But this is only part—and the least fundamental part—of the misunderstanding. Liberalism is not simply the absence of illiberal or anti-liberal institutions, like tyranny and terrorism. Nor even is liberalism simply the existence of particular democratic and free market institutions. Liberalism is a philosophy, a set of beliefs. These beliefs—about how individuals should structure their relationships with each other and organise themselves to deal with collective problems, about the 'right' way to live in society—do imply particular behaviours and the development of particular institutions. But ultimately liberalism is a set of beliefs that individuals and societies embrace. For a liberal order to function, for liberal institutions to take root, to grow and to bear fruit, individuals and societies must believe in the 'rightness' of liberalism. Acceptance of the liberal gospel, and the maintenance of this gospel's vigour in communities that have already accepted it, is an internal matter within each individual and each society. It happens—or fails to happen—not because a hegemon wills it, but because of organic developments within human consciousness and society, developments that render liberalism's assumptions plausible and give evidence that its norms will yield the benefits claimed.

Building a new world order is thus truly a millennial task, one that exceeds even America's enormous power. A liberal world free from tyranny and terror may—and hopefully will—come, but it will not come soon, nor will it come as an act of American will. Governance based on consent rather than on force, amity between peoples, and the rule of reason and law cannot be meaningfully imposed or long sustained at gunpoint.

This is not an idealistic or naive call for pacifism. In the violent, imperfect world that exists today, America may need to act—even to use violence—to protect from harm its own

people and others who depend on it. This need to employ power for self-defence should not, though, be confused with a divine calling to do with power what cannot be done with power. Power's ability to change behaviour is well documented. No tyrant, terrorist, or torturer doubts it. Power's ability to change beliefs, though, is far more limited, more indirect and more slowly operating.

Certainly anyone well read in history would have reason to doubt the efficacy of external power in creating liberal societies. America's own experience has not been one to give cause for much optimism. Admittedly, the seriousness of the effort has waxed and waned, and American interest in building liberal institutions has always been uncomfortably entangled with a pursuit of profits, but the history of American intervention in the Caribbean basin over the last century is instructive. The magnitude of American power—economic, military and political—defies adjectives. And yet, despite the overwhelming American presence and despite repeated interventions, with how much certainty and confidence is the term 'liberal' even today applied to states and societies such as Guatemala, Honduras and Haiti? What should give pause is not simply that American power has been greater in the Caribbean basin than it is likely ever to be in the Middle East, central Asia or Africa, and that America has had a century to inculcate liberalism; America has also better understood the Caribbean basin than it understands the faraway nations it now proposes to bring into the liberal fold, has had the capacity to co-opt effectively the national elites, and has been dealing with societies already exposed to the liberal tradition. What reason is there to suspect that America will do better in Afghanistan than it has in Haiti?

The two often-touted examples of American success—Germany and Japan—are the exceptions that prove the rule. Both Germany and Japan had internalised key liberal values and developed at least the rudiments of functioning liberal political systems in the 1920s. These nations succumbed to fascism and militarism in the 1930s, but the American task in the 1940s and 1950s was to restore, not to create, liberalism.

Ultimately, however, the problem with the Bush administration's grand strategy is not

simply that we are further from the millennium than we would like to believe, and that our power to bring it about is less than we would hope. The problem is that the strategy for achieving the millennium embraced by the administration is fundamentally wrong.

Stripped to its essentials, what the Bush administration envisions is an informal global American empire. It is possible to share with the administration a profound and deeply held belief that America's liberal Western democratic values and institutions are more conducive to human happiness and well-being than any alternative and yet still doubt the wisdom of its grand strategy.

The need to employ power for self-defence should not be confused with a divine calling to do with power what cannot be done with power.

The sort of liberal crusade preached by the Bush administration promises to lead to failure and tragedy for four reasons. First, it misunderstands the nature of liberalism and therefore misdiagnoses what most threatens it. Second, efforts to impose liberalism from above or outside in themselves undermine or even destroy the international community that is the fruit of liberalism. A liberal hegemon that imposes its will on others through force of arms sacrifices its own legitimacy and undercuts the legitimacy of the liberal order it has sought to advance. Third, however noble the objective for which it is undertaken, an imperial mission threatens the liberal democracy of a republic that chooses to pursue this path. Fourth, the imperial pursuit of a liberal world order presumes a moral clarity that is in fact lacking.

Liberalism's real war

The Bush administration's understanding of liberalism and of humanity's troubled love affair with it is profoundly flawed. This leads to an underestimation of the difficulties of living the liberal life and to a misunderstanding of what most threatens liberal societies.

The Bush administration fails to acknowledge the possibility that individuals who are free to choose may not choose what we believe is best for them, or even what is in fact best for them. The phrasing used by the president in the National Security Strategy is revealing: America will use its strength, he says, to create ‘conditions in which all nations and all societies *can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty*’ (NSS, p.1, emphasis added). They are free to choose, but only to choose liberalism. This is a ballot from which all the inferior candidates have already been removed. For the Bush administration, there is no logical inconsistency between freedom and the requirement that the liberal alternative be selected, since it is inconceivable that anyone, given an opportunity to choose freely, would choose any other option.

The Bush administration fails to acknowledge the possibility that individuals who are free to choose may not choose what we believe is best for them, or even what is in fact best for them.

In this view, the only obstacles to a liberal world are those imposed by anachronistic political institutions, by exploitative, self-serving tyrants and by a handful of deluded, violent individuals. Remove these—that is, remove the tyranny of kings (Wilson’s achievement in his war to make the world safe for democracy), remove the tyranny of totalitarian states (the great accomplishment of World War II and the Cold War), remove the tyranny of kleptocratic or brutal dictators (the first of Bush’s challenges today), and remove criminal and terroristic elements in political life (the second of Bush’s challenges today)—and liberal values and institutions will inevitably triumph.

This view does not entertain the possibility that humans are capable of passion and irrationality. It does not allow the possibility that, even while loving freedom, justice and order, humans may be motivated by darker desires as well. It does not acknowledge that humans sometimes sacrifice the long-term good for short-term gratification. It

does not admit the possibility that humans can be moved by anger, vengeance, or pique, and that they are susceptible to demagoguery.

In other words, it fails to recognise that the threat to liberal values and liberal institutions lies within us as well as outside of us. It is not simply illiberal institutions and illiberal individuals that threaten freedom, peace and cooperation. What endangers liberalism is also the weakness or incompleteness of our own liberal faith and, consequently, our own capacity to adopt illiberal institutions and behaviour.

This failure to see the threat within may well be rooted in American liberalism’s tendency towards a belief in both transcendent human rationality and progress. Liberal institutions are conceived of as an end state: once achieved they are assumed secure. Progress is a one-way street. Having reached liberalism, we are secure.

The alternative conception understands that liberalism is a constant challenge; a potentially impermanent condition; a vulnerable, if not necessarily delicate, plant requiring continued attention. It acknowledges the daily struggle to live according to liberalism’s rules and precepts, to repress the other desires of our hearts, to view our predicament in long-term perspective and eschew short-term solutions and gratification, to rein in our passions and to judge wisely and avoid the lures of demagogues. This is an inherently troubling conception, but it is surely a more realistic understanding of liberalism.

Perhaps, however, the president is right. Perhaps the superiority of liberalism (or, even more narrowly, American-style liberalism) is evident to all, except tyrants and terrorists whom can be killed or otherwise removed from the political stage. Perhaps we have indeed reached, or are about to reach, an ‘end of history’.

Neither a critical reading of history nor even a cursory glance at recent newspapers offers much reason for optimism. Liberalism may well be the best way to organise our lives, societies and politics. There are, however, a lot of deluded individuals, societies, and political actors today—as there have always been in the past. One does not have to look to the Muslim world, to the failed states and kleptocracies spotting the map of sub-Saharan Africa, to Confucian societies, to

the world's largest democracy, India, or to certain postcommunist states like Serbia to find doubts about liberalism. Even in societies where liberal values and institutions are deeply entrenched one finds challenges. In Western Europe there exist right-wing populist political parties that, while arguably still within the liberal tradition, embrace platforms whose strident nationalism (and in some cases, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Islamism and xenophobia) balances their commitment to liberalism. The power of fascism and communism may have been broken, but for the alienated their allure remains.

Even in America there have always been voices arguing against liberal institutions and liberal values, voices suggesting either that these values are undesirable or sometimes need to be sacrificed or limited to achieve other equally important values. These voices have often been influential. The United States lived with slavery for its first three generations. It denied women the right to vote until well into the 20th century. It was home to the Ku Klux Klan. It restricted civil rights for a century after the Civil War. It long accepted racially or ethnically based immigration restrictions. It tolerated McCarthyism. Such a list is not meant as an indictment of America. It is meant only to remind us that even a polity based on Jefferson's stirring Declaration of Independence and incorporating the Bill of Rights in its fundamental constitution is capable of illiberal thought and action.

This warning of the danger that lies within in no way denies that there is a threat to peace and freedom from foreign tyrants and terrorists. It does, however, underscore that tyrants and terrorists are not the *only* threat to liberalism. For a superpower like the United States, there are reasons to suspect that external threats generated by the world's weak and dispossessed will pose less of a challenge than the internal ones posed by an unchecked growth of governmental power, by the breakdown of the family and other vital social institutions, by alienation from the land and from production, or by racism, sexism and xenophobia. While protection against external threats is necessary, a sole focus on external dangers (and opportunities) runs the risk of losing the real war. Given human nature, the struggle to build and maintain liberalism at home is a never-ending one.

The costs of liberal imperialism, abroad and at home

The problem with the grand strategy embraced by the Bush administration, however, is not simply that it focuses exclusively on only one of the threats to liberalism. The problem is that, even in terms of the threat it has identified, the strategy is self-defeating. It is aimed at creating international peace and individual freedom, but instead jeopardises both.

The effort to create a global, liberal empire is already bringing America into conflict with friends around the world—with those who share the very values that it seeks to advance and spread. This growing fissure between the United States and its allies is what most realists would predict. As realists observe, there is a tendency for power to balance power. Attempts to create an empire—any sort of empire—are expected to encourage an offsetting reaction. The harder a sovereign fights to expand its dominion and influence, the larger and stronger will be the coalition that forms against it. The pursuit of empire thus tends to be self-defeating.

The effort to create a global, liberal empire is already bringing America into conflict with friends around the world—with those who share the very values that it seeks to advance and spread.

America's crusade to build a global *liberal* empire may be particularly self-defeating. It may have been necessary to bomb Afghanistan, funnel decisive aid to the rebels fighting the central government, intervene on a massive scale in the nation's political, economic and social life, and rearrange the nation's domestic politics to ensure the Taliban is kept from power. It may, on balance, have been wise to target al-Qaeda leaders in the Yemeni desert for assassination in a high-tech hit delivered from an unmanned drone loitering overhead. It may, in the end, be the course of wisdom to have invaded Iraq and, at American gunpoint, attempted to install a new and hopefully different government. Perhaps the

The United States has found its previous forays into imperialism deeply divisive. [But these] were generally limited in scope. What the president now proposes is something of an altogether greater magnitude.

benefits outweigh the costs. But it should be clear that the costs are real.

In the end, for the liberal order to be secure and stable, freedom and peace must rest on widespread acknowledgment of the rule of law, rather than the rule of power. A liberal order depends on general acceptance that governance needs to rest on consent, not imposition. Every act of violence, every government or law imposed from outside or without consent from above, is a violation of the norms of liberalism, and each violation weakens the liberal edifice that is being constructed.

The harm is twofold. First, it undercuts efforts to transform illiberal regimes and societies into liberal ones. To preach the right of nations to determine their own destinies and to rule themselves free from arbitrary authority and, at the same time, to dictate these nations' choice of political constitution, government and domestic policies is, at a minimum, to risk the charge of hypocrisy. There may be reasons why the possession of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq or North Korea is, in the end, unacceptable and why the United States and its liberal allies need to destroy these arsenals and, perhaps, to overthrow the regimes that chose to build them. But no-one should be surprised if one of the lessons drawn from this is that, in the end, the strong do what they will and the weak submit as they must—hardly a lesson that provides a good foundation for the spread of liberal values and institutions.

Second, a political and military crusade to construct a liberal empire is likely to undermine existing liberal international institutions. Liberal institutions are being asked to act in ways that are fundamentally at odds with their own character and values. Again, it may, on balance, have been the course of wisdom to undertake a preventive

war against Iraq. But it was unreasonable to expect NATO (or the larger community of liberal states) to embrace without dissent an aggressive war with the goal of imposing a new government. These are the sorts of activities that liberalism opposes, not embraces, and that liberal institutions are designed to prevent, not facilitate.

It is thus not surprising that the Bush administration's crusade has been widely criticised across the liberal world and that liberal international institutions have bent only with reluctance to serve this crusade. This reluctance to go a-crusading should be taken as a sign of the general health of liberal values and liberal institutions.

The fraying and unravelling of the laboriously woven fabric of international institutions is only one of the prices the United States will have to pay for this crusade. The cost at home will be dearer still. The real tragedy for America is likely to be that the pursuit of liberal imperium conflicts with its own republican values.

The United States has found its previous forays into imperialism deeply divisive. In the past it has, wisely, drawn back, leaving scars that with time healed. Past forays, however, were generally limited in scope—for example, in the Philippines after the Spanish American War. After World War I, America rejected Wilson's crusade. After World War II, the United States worked to rebuild liberal democracy where depression and war had overthrown it or cast it into doubt, but compromised and engaged with non-liberal forces across the wide reaches of the globe. But it is worth recalling that even the limited wars it did fight—in Korea and Vietnam—and the limited covert efforts it undertook were difficult for the republic to accommodate. What the president now proposes is something of an altogether greater magnitude.

Grey is a colour too

Finally, the neat distinctions between good and evil that the Bush administration draws are, in the real world, impossible to make. In enunciating American foreign policy, the president speaks in terms of moral clarities and moral universalities, not of ambiguities, tensions and tradeoffs. 'Some worry', the president mused at West Point,

that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right

and wrong. I disagree. Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place . . . There can be no neutrality between justice and cruelty, between the innocent and the guilty. We are in conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name. By confronting evil and lawless regimes, we do not create a problem, we reveal a problem. (WP, p.4)

We cannot, however, evade the need for careful moral judgement simply by declaring that tyrants and terrorism are, *per se*, bad: for however true, this does not mean that all policies to rid the world of tyrants and terrorism are morally acceptable. Nor does it mean that an absence of democratic institutions or the threat of indiscriminate violence is in every case morally intolerable. We can, for example, condemn Stalin as a brutal and ruthless dictator and still make common cause with him against Nazi Germany and decline to start World War III to free the Soviet Union from his grip.

Life, like foreign policy, is all about living with moral tensions and making troubling moral tradeoffs. It compels us, at times, to compromise with evil, because the act of destroying that evil would itself require a covenant with evil, yielding in the end an even more evil outcome. In our opposition to terrorists and tyrants we must bear in mind not only the harm our actions might do to the innocent but also the danger that in this struggle against evil we become, in some small measure, precisely what we abhor.

If a crusade to rid the world of tyrants and terrorists is unlikely to result in the millennial moment the president seeks, if it overlooks the danger to freedom and peace that lurks within our own breasts, if it endangers the world's liberal institutions and the stability of America's liberal democratic republic, and if it leaves not moral clarity but continued moral ambiguity, what, then, is to be done? If one shares the president's enunciated goal of human freedom and international peace, is there an alternative path that is more likely to bring us to this destination?

There is no millennium at hand. There is no quick fix or single, easy answer. Freedom and peace are possible, but they are not achieved once

and for all time, and they are not achieved through a crusade. They are achieved through the daily, often frustrating, and sometimes unrewarding process of compromise, negotiation and self-restraint. War and violations of freedom are not tumours that can be surgically removed. They are recurring inflammations, the consequence of weaknesses inherent in human nature, that can at times be prevented through forethought and that can at other times be treated. A wise policy aims to strengthen the global body politic to reduce its susceptibility—and our own susceptibility—to these inflammations.

Freedom and peace are possible, but they are not achieved once and for all time, and they are not achieved through a crusade.

But the process of human and social development is neither rapid nor linear, and it resists efforts to rush it or force it in particular directions. Such an understanding does not condone evil or engage in some sort of confused moral relativism that equates repression with freedom or violence with peace; nor does it deny that violence at times must be countered with violence. It does, however, recognise that amity and peaceful relations between peoples cannot in the end be imposed at gunpoint, and that freedom imposed by imperial diktat is not freedom at all.

Endnotes

- ¹ George W. Bush, 'Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York', www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/print/20020601-3.html
- ² 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002', www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html
- ³ Condoleeza Rice's January 2000 *Foreign Affairs* article was, and continues to be, widely viewed as the campaign's basic foreign policy statement. Dr Rice is, of course, now National Security Advisor in the Bush administration. See C. Rice, 'Promoting the National Interest', *Foreign Affairs* 79:1 (January/February 2000), pp.45-62.

Rhetoric matters

Owen Harries

Edward Rhodes' critique of what is, in effect, the 'Bush Doctrine' is the most penetrating that I have yet come across.

That doctrine is set out in the presidential document, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, published in September 2002. Anyone (or at least any Australian accustomed to understatement and scepticism) reading President Bush's three page introduction to that document is likely to conclude that what follows in its 31 pages is going to be an exercise in windy rhetoric. In that introduction the words 'free', 'freedom' and 'liberty' occur 28 times, while the word 'interest' appears only twice—an unusual balance for a document purporting to address the question of national security.

Yet to dismiss the document as 'mere rhetoric' would be a profound error in at least three respects. First, as Rhodes advises and as the history of the last hundred years copiously demonstrates, it is wise to take rhetoric seriously. If people had done so, they would have been much better equipped to understand the Lenins, Hitlers and Mussolinis of the world—as well as the Woodrow Wilsons, Churchills and Reagans. It is a false sophistication to believe that what political leaders say publicly is only window-dressing, and that they say and think quite different things in private.

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Second, the particular ideological content of this particular document reflects a deep and persistent strain in the American psyche—one that insists that the United States has an historic, even a divine, mission to reshape the world in its own image. As Robert Kagan, one of the strongest and most effective supporters of the Bush doctrine, has put it, 'This enduring American

view of their nation's exceptional place in history, their conviction that their interests and the world's interests are one, may be welcomed, ridiculed, or lamented. But it should not be doubted.' There are, of course, other competing strains in the American makeup, including very realistic ones. But one of the effects of the terror of 9/11 is that it has created a climate that favours the uniting of this messianic strain with the realist strain, producing a very assertive strategic stance, a muscular Wilsonianism.

A third and obvious reason for not dismissing the content of the document as windy rhetoric is that very shortly after it was spelt out, all its principal components were put into effect in Iraq: the ideological goal of 'draining the swamp' and replacing it with the fertile meadows of liberal democracy; the dependence on military power to achieve this goal; the readiness to use that power pre-emptively and not just to deter; and the evident willingness to proceed unilaterally if necessary—not to let any concern with consensus or compromise define the mission.

The Bush doctrine can be and has been criticised on several grounds: for overstating what even America's awesome power can achieve; for not being modest and restrained enough to reassure other powers and reconcile them to American hegemony; for creating dangerous precedents that others may exploit; for insisting on double standards for itself and others (as when it simultaneously declares that it will maintain its military supremacy and advises China to give up the 'outdated' policy of pursuing advanced military capability).

But Rhodes makes an even more fundamental criticism when he argues that the end the doctrine is concerned to pursue—a liberal democratic world—and the means it intends to use to achieve it—military power—are incompatible. The doctrine misunderstands not only the magnitude but also the nature of the task. For it 'fails to acknowledge the possibility that individuals who are free to choose may not choose what we believe is best for them, or what is in fact best for them.' And you cannot force people to be liberal and free.

Is all this irrelevant now? Does the American experience in Iraq mean that the Bush Doctrine has been discredited almost at its birth and that it will now be quietly dropped? Perhaps. But I would

not bet on it just yet. For the cast of mind that it represents is a powerful one, and its advocates are determined, able and influential. Besides, a retreat from the doctrine would carry serious political costs in terms of prestige and influence.

That is why what happens in Iraq in the next few months will have an importance that transcends Iraq itself. If the American grip on the situation strengthens and rapid progress is made, the problems of the last few months will be relegated to teething trouble as part of a learning process. On the other hand, if instead of draining the swamp the United States starts to feel that it is being drawn deeper and deeper, it is likely that it will rethink how best to play its hegemonic role.

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The 'vision thing'

Allan Gyngell

High foreign policy rhetoric has never been the Howard Government's style. Partly it smacked too much of the 'Big Picture' approach of its predecessor. But more importantly it is at odds with the pragmatic, cautious, instrumental way in which John Howard seems to view foreign policy and with the equally cautious, tactical way in which he had practised it. For the most part, policy under the Howard Government has been an incremental business, enunciated more often in talk back radio interviews than in grand set piece speeches. The exception—the two White Papers on foreign policy issued in 1997 and 2002—both caused problems: the first was overrun by the Asian financial crisis; the second had a long and difficult gestation and saw its views on the South Pacific fall victim to a policy shift almost as soon as it was published.

The long period of joint management of external policy between John Howard and Alexander Downer, now outlasted as a double act only by Menzies and Casey, has bedded itself down into a comfortable alliance of pragmatist

and realist. 'Practical' and 'realistic' are, indeed, two of the Government's favourite adjectives in speeches on international policy. (In contrast, the defining coalition in the preceding Labor Government was between essentially realist Prime Ministers—Hawke and Keating—and essentially idealist foreign ministers—Hayden and Evans.)

If Rhodes is right, the Howard government's grand strategy depends on an ever-closer union with a power whose 'liberal crusade . . . promises to lead to failure and tragedy'.

The Howard Government's foreign policy approach was summed up in the language of the first White Paper *In the National Interest* in August 1997: 'Preparing for the future is not a matter of grand constructs. It is about the hard-headed pursuit of the interests which lie at the core of foreign and trade policy'. Downer proclaimed his realist credentials almost as soon as he came to office and has repeated them often.

Howard agrees with this approach¹ although he has expressed it less often and has sometimes placed more explicit weight on the role of values in foreign policy. These values, however, are seen as existing cultural realities (our 'history', as he sometimes puts it) that bind nations like Australia and America or Australia and Britain together rather than as universal goals that Australia has a responsibility to promote.²

Not even in the speeches of the Defence Minister, Senator Hill, who has come closer than any of his colleagues in government to wrestling publicly with the implications of American policy, can be found anything that looks remotely like the Wilsonian internationalism that Edward Rhodes sees pervading and undermining George W. Bush's grand strategy.

In the arguments for going to war with Iraq, for example, the language of Australian foreign policy showed little of Bush's moral universalism ('The power and appeal of human liberty is felt in every life and every land. And the greatest power of freedom is to overcome hatred and violence

and to turn the creative gifts of men and women to the pursuits of peace³) or of Blair's thundering Gladstonianism ('But these challenges and the others that confront us—poverty, the environment, the ravages of disease—require a world of order and stability. Dictators like Saddam, terrorist groups like Al Qaida threaten the very existence of such a world.').⁴ Instead, the arguments offered in favour of Australia's involvement were almost all functional and national. As John Howard told the Australian people, the reasons for Australia's participation related to '... the concern I have for the security of this country in the medium- to longer-term if the twin evils of the spread of weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism are not confronted and are not effectively dealt with . . . Of course, our alliance with the United States is also a factor, unapologetically so.'⁵ Any hint of the 'moral imperative' that Rhodes points to at the core of the Bush Administration's policies is deeply muted.

Even the case for *Operation Helpem Fren*, the intervention in the Solomon Islands, usually (and incorrectly in my view) presented as Exhibit A in the argument that some sort of fundamental shift has taken place in Australia's foreign policy approach, is made in quite limited terms. The reasons again come down to Australia's national security: 'If Australia wants security we need to do all that we can to ensure that our region, our neighbourhood, is stable—that governance is strong and the rule of law is just.'⁶

'Australian foreign policy', Alexander Downer insisted, 'must be based not on dreamy idealism, but on a hard-headed understanding of the power structures of the Asia Pacific region.'⁷ But what happens when the 'dreamy idealist' is your major ally?

The problem for the Howard Government is not (as it arguably is for Tony Blair) that it has signed on to a particular, flawed, vision of the world. John Howard's sceptical approach to the 'vision thing' seems much closer in tone to that of the current President's father. Rather the problem is the practical one that, if Rhodes is right, the Howard Government's own grand strategy depends on an ever-closer union with a power whose 'liberal crusade . . . promises to lead to failure and tragedy'.

For the deepening of the alliance relationship with the United States lies at the heart of that strategy. It is articulated in the latest foreign policy White Paper, although it sometimes struggles to make itself heard clearly above the buzz of diplomatic cocktail chatter going on around it. The White Paper argues that Australia's security alliance with the United States is a 'practical manifestation' of our shared values and is fundamental to our security, that the United States will remain the pre-eminent global power for the foreseeable future and that—and implicitly '*therefore*'—the Government wants to deepen the alliance.⁸

Confidence in the continued global dominance of a strong, outward-looking and economically robust United States has underpinned the Howard Government's commitments to the Iraq war, to a Free Trade Agreement with the United States, to deeper interoperability between the Australian and American defence forces. The conviction that a stronger relationship with the United States strengthens Australia's position in Asia and the Pacific has shaped the government's approach to regional diplomacy too.

So the Australian government (not to mention the nation's reputation and international influence) has a lot riding on an American vision about which its own members have been politely silent but which seems at odds with almost everything they believe about the way the world works.

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Endnotes

- ¹ See for example his Address to the Sydney Institute, (Sydney: 1 July 2003).
- ² See Prime Minister's joint press conference with George W. Bush at the President's Texas ranch in May 2003.
- ³ Address to the Nation by President George W. Bush (17 March 2003).
- ⁴ Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, Address to the Nation (20 March 2003).
- ⁵ Hon. John Howard MP, Address to the National Press Club (Canberra: 14 March 2003).
- ⁶ Hon. John Howard MP Address to Australia-America Association luncheon (Melbourne: 2 September 2003).
- ⁷ Hon. Alexander Downer MP, "Neither Isolated nor Isolationist": The Legacy of Australia's Close Engagement with Asia', Speech to Murdoch University Asia Research Centre (9 August 2000).
- ⁸ see *Advancing the National Interest*, chapter 6.

A call to inaction

Peter Jennings

There is much to agree with in Edward Rhodes' essay—war is bad; the reality of international relations is more complicated than we read in policy statements; the pathways of world history are littered with error and inconsistency. These things are all true, and the aspiration to achieve global 'amity and peaceful relations between peoples' is laudable if naive. Ultimately, though, Rhodes' argument is a call to inaction. If there is no acceptable way that liberal values can be defended or actively extended beyond the existing democracies, then dictators will sleep secure behind national borders while the rest of us look the other way.

George W. Bush's July 2002 West Point speech and his National Security Strategy statement of the same year are indeed clear expressions of America's intent to defeat enemies abroad and to promote liberal values globally. The focus on terrorism has, of course, been made an overwhelming priority because of the attacks of September 11, 2001, but the liberalising imperative that so worries Edward Rhodes is hardly new. One thinks not only of Woodrow Wilson but of US support for decolonisation after 1945, of America's reaction to the Suez Crisis in 1956, and Ronald Reagan's condemnation of the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire' in March 1983. America has long sought to export the liberal values of open economies and democratic political systems. On this issue George W. Bush's foreign policy differs little from past US administrations.

Rhodes is right to argue that liberal values cannot be imposed, as Mao might say, through the barrel of a gun. But he is wrong to suggest that such values can only grow slowly from within. Much of the postcolonial and indeed postcommunist experience of the last century involved outside powers accelerating the pace at which countries adopted liberal democracy. There was, for example, the British in Malaya and Singapore, and much of Africa, the French and Americans in South Vietnam, the Americans in the Philippines, the Australians in Papua New Guinea. In these and in many other countries, liberal democratic systems were hurriedly grafted onto societies where, to use Rhodes' phrase, there

was precious little 'organic developments . . . that render liberalism's assumptions plausible'. There were some failures but in some cases the grafts took. As we saw in Germany and Japan, and are seeing now in Iraq, with no little amount of effort and difficulty, the extension of liberal norms can and should be hastened along by external pressure.

Edward Rhodes' strongest and least defensible assertion is that 'stripped to its essentials, what the Bush administration envisions is an informal global American empire' where subject states are ' . . . free to choose but only to choose liberalism'. But is 'empire' the right word to describe, say, American plans for Iraq? Is the United States stealing Iraqi oil and stripping other assets for its own economic enrichment? No. Is it banning local languages, customs and religions? No, on the contrary those practices are re-emerging after Saddam's ouster. Is America annexing the most strategically valuable areas of land or imprisoning non-violent political opponents or forcibly relocating populations while colonising areas with its own people? No. All these things the Russians did in their empire, the subject states of Eastern Europe and the USSR.

Rhodes is right to argue that liberal values cannot be imposed, as Mao might say, through the barrel of a gun. But he is wrong to suggest that such values can only grow slowly from within.

By contrast the attraction of America's liberalising policies is that they bring aid, greater stability and political choice to peoples that previously had only repression. None of this is to suggest that the task of democratising Iraq will be easy. Clearly that is not the case. But the biggest danger Iraq faces now is not that the Americans will refuse to leave but rather that they may choose to go too quickly. This is hardly the behaviour of a power bent on building an empire.

What are the implications for Australia of America's 'liberal agenda'? We largely share the

same value system and this has underpinned Australia's strategic decisions to be involved with the US and like-minded allies in conflicts going back to World War I. We may worry from time to time about the manner or timing of American strategic policy, but there continues to be a close identification of our respective national interests based on shared values and similar strategic perceptions. Indeed, in our own neighbourhood Australia seeks to promote the values of liberal democracy as a way to improve the quality of government and boost regional living standards. In Bougainville, East Timor and the Solomon Islands, Australia too has used its military forces in the last few years to achieve what Edward Rhodes says cannot be done—promoting more open, more competent and better quality governments based on liberal democratic principles. Our region is the better for these Australian efforts.

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Fighting words

Coral Bell

Every bureaucrat in DFAT and Defence in Canberra ought to read Professor Rhodes on the current strategic doctrine of the Bush administration in its first term. If long-term realities lived up to the ambitions it implies, Australian diplomatic and defence problems would loom rather formidably. But I am not at all sure that the current doctrine will remain that of a second Bush term, if there is one. And I am fairly certain that if any of the present Democrat contenders makes it to the White House, substantial changes will be in order.

My only real dissent from Professor Rhodes' analysis of the West Point speech and the National Security Strategy is that he seems to take them too seriously as statements of intent.

Moreover, the current doctrine is far distant from that with which Bush came into office in 2001. Then he was fiercely derisive of the sort of 'nation-building' in which he is now perforce expensively engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan, and of the tepidly Wilsonian policies of his predecessor, Bill Clinton. His current policies could reasonably be described as Wilsonianism with missiles, but it is a product not of Bush's own instincts but of the trauma of 9/11 and the rise of the neo-conservatives.

My only real dissent from Professor Rhodes' analysis of the fighting words in the West Point speech and the National Security Strategy is that he seems to take them too seriously as statements of intent. He writes, for instance, that the Bush administration's 'liberal crusade . . . promises to lead to failure and tragedy'. Yes, if policies always matched words. But the two texts should be regarded rather as the 'declaratory signals' of a particular moment in the evolution of US foreign policy—a moment at the peak point of what can only be called nationalist messianism. But a moment which has now passed, Washington having suffered a sharp reality check in Iraq and in the UN Security Council.

I am entirely with Professor Rhodes in his consternation not only at the implied objectives of US policy ('nothing less than a transformation of world politics, domestic as well as international') but at the further implication that such a transformation could be based on 'a global American military hegemony'.

That may once have been a Pentagon vision, but even there not everyone shared it. The conflict between 'the suits' and 'the uniforms' was widely reported. Most importantly, the concept raised no enthusiasm in the electorate, and in an election year that point did not escape the President. Perhaps this is why Condoleezza Rice, not Donald Rumsfeld, is now in charge of policy in Iraq. The West Point speech was obviously written to inspire a group of just-graduating young officers who might be going into their first battles. It would have been received in stony silence at the Security Council, where most of Bush's preoccupations have been lately. Rumsfeld's calculations about the brevity of the conventional war were sound, but he seems to have underestimated the subsequent guerrilla phase, in which advanced US weapons

are much less decisive, and the financial burdens of occupation are great.

Only since July 2003 has the cost of the initial agenda begun to be reckoned up in Washington and the electorate. The outcome is of course as yet uncertain and that creates uncertainties for the two allies who went into combat alongside the US in Iraq, Britain and Australia. For Britain those uncertainties are mostly political, but for Australia mostly a matter of the allocation of scarce defence resources. John Howard's backbenchers, unlike Tony Blair's, could not raise a single murmur of dissent between then, and the Opposition fell flat on its collective face.

If there is an audible murmur (of disquiet rather than dissent) it comes chiefly from the armed forces and the academic strategists. From just 1.9% of national income, current policies expect three kinds of strategic capacity to be produced. Special forces and some navy specialism, like mine-clearing and ship searches, are required for operations with US forces in Iraq and maybe Korea. Regular troops are needed for operations such as East Timor and the Solomons, and maybe Papua New Guinea. Advanced weaponry like fighter aircraft and missile defence is required for safeguarding the 'sea-air' gap to our north. It often seems like trying to get a quart out of a pint-pot. Arguments about which role should be given priority are inevitable, and the answers necessarily entail assessments of the future of US policy, and of what is most vital to the Australian national interest.

If you believe that operations like Iraq and Afghanistan will prove a large part of Australia's future military commitments, there is a case, some Army chiefs believe, for a new tank, maybe even the fabulously heavy and expensive Abrams tank. But if you believe that operations like the Solomons are more likely, the case for expansion of Army numbers, like military police and civil affairs officers, should have priority. The core defence-of-Australia function is a bit overshadowed by the other two in current circumstances, but will resume its central place in time.

No-one in Washington wants extra military burdens in an election year. The change of tone since the real burdens of Iraq and Afghanistan began to be understood (about July 2003) is unmistakable.

A talented though untutored general in the American Civil War was once heard instructing his artillery officers, 'Elevate them sights a bit lower please gentlemen!'. Both the President and the electorate seem to me to be sending the same signal to some Washington policymakers at present. Which may with luck ease some strains on Australian forces.

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Three cheers for the Anglosphere

David Flint

Not since the Reagan administration has the grand strategy of the United States been so clear and coherent. While this has given comfort to her friends and fear to her enemies, it has also sowed doubt, even outrage, in Western intellectual circles. This reached its apogee with the intervention in Iraq. But this is hardly an indication that a swathe of other interventions is about to follow.

Iraq was in long and serious breach of the conditions for the truce at the end of the first Gulf war, and of the resulting Security Council resolutions. Indeed, in its last resolution before the intervention, the Council unanimously recognised this. And had the intervention not taken place, it is most unlikely that Saddam Hussein would have changed his ways. It would have been only a matter of time before the Council would have authorised the use of force. Or, as is more likely, there would have gradually been an acceptance, probably tacit, that Saddam was free to do whatever he wanted to in developing weapons of mass destruction.

In the face of that, the Americans and British could have concluded that continuing to protect the autonomous Kurdish region was not worth the cost. In that event Saddam's defeat in the first Gulf War would have only been a setback to his long-term strategy. But as the head of a leading French think tank, Tzvetan Todorov wrote in *Le Nouveau Desordre Mondial* '... for the first time since 1945, Europe seemed no longer willing

to align itself on the foreign policy of the US' (p.12). Toderev's response is to propose a federal Europe whose very existence would be a restraint on unilateralism on the part of the United States.

This approach suggests that the US is little different from other aggressive and expansionist powers. But that is surely the point—the US is different. As Robert Kagan puts it in *Paradise and Power*, '... The United States is a liberal progressive society through and through, and to the extent that Americans believe in power they believe it must be a means of advancing the principles of a liberal civilization and a liberal world order' (p.41).

Rhodes is concerned that the National Security Strategy is based exclusively on US military hegemony and that there is every intention to maintain this pre-eminence. But what is so surprising about that? What would be surprising would be for the United States to abandon its pre-eminence.

Surely this is so. Just about every country liberated by the US in the World War II—and indeed by the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand—was not only offered massive American financial assistance, they also received that gift of inestimable value, their freedom. And the National Security Strategy (NSS) is clearly based on Kagan's proposition.

Notwithstanding the clear caveats in the policy itself, which he recognises, Professor Rhodes seems to fear that the aim is to create an informal global empire—'Wilsonianism with a vengeance'. He is concerned that the NSS is based exclusively on US military hegemony, and that there is every intention to maintain this pre-eminence. But what is so surprising about this? What would be surprising would be for the United States to abandon its pre-eminence, or to believe the formation of a coalition is always to be a precondition for action. While this would be a sensible policy for a declining power, it is hardly appropriate for one at its peak.

Rhodes is also concerned by what he sees as the reliance on pre-emptive self-defence. But international law does not require that a nation wait until the bombs are falling. To hold otherwise is to embrace what Conrad Black described in the Winter 2001/02 issue of *The National Interest* as 'spurious moral relativism'—demanding proof equal to that a refined domestic criminal justice system would require before taking any military action.

An egregious example was President Clinton's acceptance of advice not to intercept Osama bin Laden's plane when he left Khartoum, although he was implicated in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and the bombing of US facilities in Saudi Arabia. Clinton is believed to regard this as the greatest error of his administration. And even Toderev would allow his proposed European army to intervene on humanitarian grounds to stop a genocidal bloodbath.

Rhodes is on firmer ground when he argues that liberal order cannot be imposed from outside. Liberalism—in the best sense of the word—is a philosophy and a set of beliefs and more than just elections with universal suffrage. Fareed Zakaria is right when he argues in *The Future of Freedom* that it is more important that the seeds of a liberal society be sown before a formal democracy is established. The many unsuccessful attempts to translate US-style constitutionalism to less fertile ground in Latin America are testimony to this.

Indeed, Zakaria's thesis explains the political success of the United States from their origin as the freest colonies the world had seen. They had inherited the same liberal principles their colonial mistress enjoyed. (From their loss, the British learned that the conclusion of their imperial adventure would be the gradual autonomy and then freedom of all their colonies. And so the greater part of the English speaking world, at least the old Commonwealth, is also an adherent of Kagan's proposition.)

Professor Rhodes has no need to worry. The US remains different from other powers. It is only that both the policy and practice of this administration is more coherent and more based on principle.

David Flint is an emeritus professor of law. His latest book, *The Twilight of the Elites*, is published by Freedom Publishing, Melbourne.