

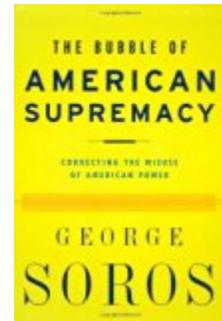
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George Soros. *The Bubble of American Supremacy*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2004. x + 207 pp. \$22.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58648-217-6.

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Neo-Conservatism, the Bush Doctrine, and the Pursuit of Open Societies: Policies at Odds in the Twenty-first Century

The Bubble of American Supremacy was written prior to the presidential election of 2004 in what appears to have been an effort to convince U.S. voters not to re-elect George W. Bush. In order to convince voters, Soros focuses his critique of Bush's policies and offers a "constructive vision" as an alternative to the Bush doctrine. Soros's work must be considered within the wider context of anti-neoconservative literature as well as within the body of literature on modern international relations. As such, this review addresses Soros's work in following Bush's successful bid for re-election and will also address the long-term validity and impact of Soros's conceptual framework and methodology, his analysis of Bush's policies, and his alternative approach to foreign policy.

George Soros, financier, author, philanthropist and philosopher, has a unique perspective on the Bush doctrine.[1] He heads the Soros Management Fund and has founded a global network of organizations dedicated to promoting open and democratic societies. He has written several books on international relations, economics, and open societies. Soros is a long-time liberal political activist and has publicly opposed George W. Bush, particularly during his campaign for re-election. He is reported to have given over twenty-three million dollars to various anti-Bush causes during the 2004 campaign.

The Bubble of American Supremacy endeavors to be both a critique of the Bush doctrine and an alternative approach to governance. Contrary to other critiques of the Bush doctrine, Soros does not begin with the war in

Afghanistan, or with Bush's declaration of a "war on terrorism." Instead, Soros's thesis attacks the Bush doctrine and what he believes to be its roots: neoconservatism and the Project for the New American Century—a neoconservative think tank and policy advocacy group (p. 4). He effectively links the Project for the New American Century to the Bush doctrine and the subsequent invasion of Iraq, setting the stage for a thoughtful critique (pp. 8-10). Soros's most scathing commentary on neoconservatism is his description of the doctrine as a form of "social Darwinism" with a belief in the legitimacy of liberal democracy and its right to use force over "weaker" non-democratic nations. Soros succinctly describes the inherent problems with this vision by examining how this fundamental idea has been embraced by the Bush administration. Rejecting socially and culturally relative arguments as neither morally nor ethically justifiable, Soros also describes neoconservatism as embracing market fundamentalism, and its absolute belief in the value of free-market, neoliberal economic policies (p. 4). These are the two dominant themes that run throughout his work, and certainly offer his most compelling moral and ethical arguments against the very foundation of the Bush doctrine.

Despite Soros's eloquent critique of the foundations of neoconservatism, his use of inflammatory language such as "supremacist ideology" detracts from the seriousness of the work (pp. 9-16). It demonstrates an obvious bias that is unlikely to make this work a valid inclusion in the long-term literature on the subject. However, the

language that Soros chooses does serve one important purpose: it helps to illustrate the radical elements of the Bush doctrine and shows what Bush's policies potentially have in common with radical elements of other societies. Unfortunately Soros fails to follow this line of thought and only alludes to it in passing throughout his work.

In his assessment of the war on terror, Soros offers little in the way of unique analysis (pp. 17-30). He identifies the theoretical problems of declaring war on the rather vague concept of "terror" and the logistical and political challenges of the war in Iraq. Certainly, nothing groundbreaking is presented here, but in the context of his "American supremacist" and "market fundamentalist" argument, the American supremacist argument takes on more alarming tones. He spends several pages elaborating on Iraq as a pre-determined target for the Bush administration even prior to the attacks of September 11th, yet offers no new insight. Soros's assessments for the reasons for going to war in Iraq are the most disappointing elements of analysis—he falls back on similar arguments offered by other authors: oil, power, and the evil nature of Saddam Hussein. He fails to tie them all together in one concise argument for Bush's quest for American supremacy regardless of the cost, which is where the reader is left to assume his thesis is going.

Where Soros's work truly falls apart is in the constructive vision he proposes as an alternative to the Bush doctrine. It is a loose, poorly organized section of work that focuses a lot on his philanthropic work and publicizing his organizations. Indeed, Soros's alternate framework does not provide a solid conceptual structure from which to base foreign policy. Methodologically, Soros's work suffers from some severe empirical shortcomings. The highlight of *The Bubble of American Supremacy* is Soros's methodology, or framework of approach that he outlines in the appendix. Unfortunately, several times throughout his work, he fails to stick to the principles described in his methodology for fair and impartial analysis (pp. 191-203). In his methodology, Soros describes a fundamental issue with understanding reality as the reflexivity principle. He believes that the very acts of think-

ing and attempting to understand reality interfere with each other (pp. 191-193). As such, knowledge (particularly pure knowledge) is hard to achieve because of the principle of reflexivity. "As thinking participants, we can influence the situation in which we participate; therefore, the situation cannot serve as an independent criterion for judging the validity of our interpretation" (p. 192). This careful reminder of bias, and our effect on what we witness, is an important element of his methodology. He also uses the concept of fertile fallacies to warn against making faulty analysis. A fertile fallacy is the process of applying useful methods or thoughts from one discipline to another unrelated discipline, and Soros suggests that this has led to very bad conceptual frameworks for understanding the world (for example, applying the scientific method to social science). Essentially, he's explaining why we must treat our beliefs and "knowledge" as being provisionally true while remaining open to constant re-examination (pp. 193-194). In supporting his work, Soros uses his few footnotes as further explanation rather than as a source for his ideas or statements. Moreover, while discussing an alternative foreign policy, Soros throws around a lot of numbers regarding the budget for Iraq. None of these numbers are sourced in any way and the reader is left to take Soros's word for their accuracy (pp. 62-63).

Soros's critique of the Bush doctrine is likely to be lost in his poor presentation of his "alternative approach." The way the work is presented means that much of its potential impact was lost following Bush's re-election. The strong points of Soros's work, including the methodology for analysis that he presents and his critique, are unlikely to last as contributions to a wider academic body of literature on the Bush doctrine and neoconservatism because they are presented as an effort to convince people not to vote for a man who eventually went on to win the election.

Note

[1]. George Soros Bio, Open Society Institute website, http://www.soros.org/about/bios/a_soros (accessed 24 Oct 2006).

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