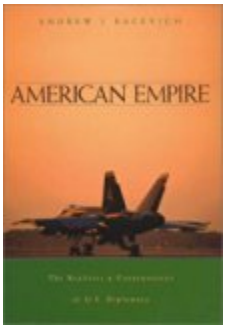
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Andrew J. Bacevich. *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. 302 S. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-00940-0.



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Published on H-USA (May, 2003)

Unbounded Ambitions of a Powerful Nation

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The twentieth century has been a political triumph for America–indeed, it was an American Century. The United States has been successful in the Great War, in forging Western Europe into its fold through NATO, and not only defeating Japan but also emerging as its benefactor. It has been victorious in the Cold War, from the Berlin airlift to the break-up of the Soviet Union (with obvious exceptions, like Vietnam). It calls the shots in the UNO and it is the most important member of various economic forums–whether the IMF, the World Bank, or the WTO. It is not far off to say, when the U.S. Federal Reserve sneezes, the world economy catches cold. It also has successfully crafted North America into a free trade area. In military terms, it has taught lessons to rogue regimes–from the Nazis to the Taliban. In the 1990s, it engaged itself in various conflicts in different parts of the world, including Europe, Africa, and Asia.

In the post-Cold War era, the United States has charged itself with a new mission of liberating and bringing freedom to people in far off lands, waging war on terror, intervening to make peace, as well as other similar goals. Indeed, its national security policy states many such goals with =lan. Its holier-than-thou approach is visible in George W. Bush's words at West Point in June 2002. "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 liberty."

Interestingly, the United States has symbolized liberty and freedom as no other nation on earth. It has inspired revolutions, has been a melting pot of various ethnicities, has been a reservoir of talent and technology, and has been symbolic of a nation in which individuals have a chance to get ahead. Freedom in America is indeed a reality–a place where dreams can come true. For good reason, to possess a Green Card has been an ambition and a status symbol among many of the elites and sub-elites of developing countries.

However, for many people who have "self-respect," and for countries wishing to pursue an independent foreign policy, America has symbolized hegemony and arrogance. For them, the United States has been representative of a nation that has a stockpile of nuclear weapons, yet it refuses others the same technology, considering them irresponsible. Although chiding others to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), its own Senate rejected the treaty. The United States refused to sign the environmental protection treaty in the form of the Kyoto Protocol. It has refused to be part of the regime of the International Criminal Court. It has pushed forward for National Missile Defense and unilaterally abrogated the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. It is seen as a consistent meddler in the Middle East, rather than an honest broker. More significantly, the United States is seen as a coercer that has taken to itself the task of correcting the world with missionary zeal and inculcating it with American values. These American values are seen as corrupt, degrading, and profiteering. It is even asked how a country of immigrants with no history could ever have traditions and values. The United States believes it is able to coerce people and countries due to its sheer military

power and economic strength. Indeed, America is seen as a Global Policeman that has taken upon itself the task of being the accuser, prosecutor, and judge all rolled into one. The unilateralism of the Sole Superpower is hated by a large number of people who feel the United States is neo-imperialist in a time that was once considered to be the end of history. Among recent writings, scholars have spoken of its power as a paradox (J. S. Nye Jr.), for some "the eagle has crash landed" (Wallerstein), and for others it has symbolized a rogue state (W. Blum). This is not even to mention much of the critique that is written both inside and outside of the United States.

For the United States, the world seems to have shrunk into a village in its own backyard; for those who refuse to be part of such a regime, the world is indeed a hard place. Not without reason, Herman Melville (1850) wrote in *White Jacket*, "And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of the earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy." This aspect of national selfishness and a zealous claim of spreading values of freedom, democracy, and the free market through coercion (military or otherwise), characterize most of American foreign policy. As Henry Kissinger wrote with regards to the post-Cold War period, "For the third time in this century, America thus proclaimed its intention to build a new world order by applying domestic values to the world at large."[1] The debate on the nature of America's foreign policy and its role in the world context is quite old and hotly debated, and many commentators have discussed the issues of the post-Cold War in the past.

Within this context, the book written by Andrew J. Bacevich (an ex-U.S. Army Colonel and current professor of International Relations at Boston University), *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*, should come as an interesting read. My first impression was that it was a very readable book, with consistent logic, cogent arguments, and clear articulation of facts. The second impression was that this book, because it is so topical in a fast-moving international scene, would tend to become outdated rapidly, unless updated. This is taking into account that it was written before the enunciation of George W. Bush's National Security Strategy and before the invasion of Iraq. Though the back flap states that the book is "neither indictment nor celebration," the book appears critical. The book can be viewed in many ways–as a commentary on U.S. foreign policy of the 1990s, as a polemic in which the author adroitly drives through his thesis of consistency in foreign policy, as an analyst's portrayal of his sense of dismay over the rationales used by politicians to justify their foreign policy choices, or as an indicator of the potential direction that the United States is moving. This commentary of the U.S. foreign policy of the 1990s is particularly interesting given Bacevich's self-proclaimed ideological leanings as "right-wing," a "hawk," "anticommunist," "uptight," and "credulous" (p. vii).

The author finds continuity in U.S. foreign policy through different periods and administrations, and he seems to be dismayed by the direction in which the country is moving in the international scene. "Though garnished with neologistic flourishes intended to convey a sense of freshness or originality, the politicoeconomic concept to which the United States adheres today has not changed in a century. Those policies reflect a single minded determination to extend and perpetuate American hegemony–usually referred to as 'leadership'–on a global scale" (p. 6). And, "in the years after the dismantling of the Berlin Wall … American statecraft seemingly jumped its traces … they now flaunted their nation's status as the world's only superpower" (pp. vii-viii). However, this was not a novel occurrence for the American state and has a long history of continuity; this "genius of grand strategy" (p. 224), established under Woodrow Wilson, can be traced back to the Monroe Doctrine. "By the time of Wilson's presidency, the Monroe Doctrine had evolved into a rationale for U.S. military intervention and expansion of American power" (p. 115).

He debunks the myth of the "reluctant superpower." Tracing issues from 1898 and using the writings of such dissenters as Charles A. Beard and William Appelman Williams, Bacevich sets the basis of his arguments. These perspectives "rejected in their own day, [but] relevant to our own" (p. 11) are that: foreign policy is derived from a domestic policy aimed at "preserving long-standing arrangements for allocating power and privileges within American Society" (p. 17); commercial expansion is the *sine qua non* driving foreign policy; foreign policy aims to derive the benefits of empire without its attendant burdens and problems; "Open Door" imperialism includes several values for "openness"; and, this openness could be achieved by the exercise of dominant power. To put it simply, the United States is in its "civilizing mission" of spreading freedom, democracy, and the free market. While this tendency has a long history, in the post-Cold War era America has taken this role more seriously. Bacevich has no doubts that America is not an empire; nonetheless he asks "what sort of empire [do Americans] intend theirs to be" (p. 244)? Unfortunately, Bacevich does not answer this question, or, at least, not in this

book.

Developing the theme of continuity, Bacevich considers that the post-1989 globalization comes with conceits. Technology, particularly information technology, has gained disproportionate importance. And, in a world that appeared to open up rapidly, there were seemingly no visible enemies. This globalization has led America to become increasingly dependent on the outside world (just as the world is becoming more dependent on it). Despite the lack of a visible enemy, in the classical sense, there were diffuse threats all around–drugs, terrorists, refugees, computer hackers, money launderers, etc. Moreover, globalization, in its varied manifestations of information and business potential, was ultimately about power. This is due to the fact that competition is a zero-sum game. In this situation, America has embarked on the path to uphold the "right side of history." In this sense, there is no difference between the Democrats and the Republicans (or, Madeleine Albright and Colin Powell); instead they complement each other, leading to a situation of greater militarization of U.S. foreign policy. As Bacevich says, "military power became a central element" (p. 122) that encapsulated a N+1 rule, "where N equals the sum of the military capabilities of all nations who may make common cause against the United States" (p. 126). This also means "destroying an enemy's desire to fight" (p. 130), which requires increased defense expenditure and engagement in a greater number of conflicts. During the 1990s, this amounted to nearly four dozen confrontations as opposed to only sixteen during the entire Cold War.

In this regard, Bacevich also analyzes the institutional conflicts between the American bureaucracy and the Pentagon, including military officials holding important positions in foreign policy apparatus. He weaves an insightful perspective on how different officials and politicians influenced foreign policy-making during the 1990s. He also analyzes how foreign and defense policy evolved in this period, providing insightful details of the various operations in which U.S. forces were engaged in the 1990s in different parts of the world.

While his focus is the 1990s, Bacevich has traced nearly a century of U.S. intervention since 1898. Based on the policy views of American presidents (ranging from Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Dwight Eisenhower to George Bush, Sr., Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush), Bacevich concludes that U.S. foreign policy has remained the same: "even to declare that a 'new world order' was at hand was to sow confusion" (p. 77). This conclusion leads to the policy prescription that "the cause of peace was best served by the United States' occupying a position of unquestioned global pre-eminence" (p. 77). He does not spare the United States in its strategy of openness. Concerning NATO's intervention in the Balkans, he writes, "[t]he essence of that strategy was business and American political clout" (p. 105). In some ways, the global leadership of the United States became indispensable, at least in the eyes of the policy makers; a policy committed to the opening of new foreign markets abroad. Militarily, however, this imperialism was to be carried out by the modern day "mercenaries"–the Allies, the private sector–since "Americans had acquired a taste for global leadership ... without blood, sweat, and tears and at minimal cost in treasure" (p. 156). Bacevich makes the following interesting observation concerning the U.S.'s role in Africa: "Even a major commitment to opening Africa would be unlikely to contribute much to U.S. economic well-being or American political clout–and such an effort would necessarily come at the expense of other areas possessing greater immediate promise" (p. 112). Perhaps, then, African countries can rest in peace.

Bacevich is forthright in stating, "Only through the sustained application of violence did [Americans] win their independence from Great Britain. In the decades following, Americans showed little reluctance to employ force" (p. 123). It is hardly surprising to find the extension of this force as a major instrument of its foreign policy. In this context, Bacevich argues, "the military's growing influence in matters relating to foreign policy reflected the underlying logic of American grand strategy and the role of military power in advancing the prospects of openness and integration" (p. 173). It seems obvious that foreign policy is run through equivocation, or "the language of American statecraft" (p. 45). "[I]ts purpose was to reassure the public that the promotion of peace, democracy, and human rights and the punishment of evil-doers–not the pursuit of self interest–defined the essence of American diplomacy" (p. 46). This translates into high principles as purpose, and "expansive use of American military power" (p. 46) at tactical levels–leading to military intervention for creating civil societies, coercion to bring about democracy, blockades and sanctions to uphold the free market, and occupation for liberating people. The national self-interest of the global leader is obvious. Where the underlying roots of philanthropy are rooted in a search for business partners, coupled with public naivet=, America is all too happy to work with dictators, sheikhdoms, tribal coun-

cils, and even totalitarian Communists. In such instances there are no yardsticks of openness, democracy, or human rights. Such criteria are reserved for those who do not concur with the "indispensable nation."

The book suffers from only one limitation. It is a highly topical book and in dealing with such recent issues and events, some of its judgment might seem to be out of touch with the times. For example, in the case of Iraq and keeping with the thesis of continuity, Bacevich writes "in the apt judgment of the *Washington Post*, did the Bush administration find itself, 'adopting the same Iraq policy pursued in recent years by the Clinton administration' " (p. 208)? Bacevich finds that Bush "chose in most cases to hew to the course set by Bill Clinton" (p. 213). As subsequent events show, Bush is set on rewriting twenty-first century history with wars for "liberation," "democracy," and the "free market." Whether these wars are titled "wars against terror" or "wars for freedom" are immaterial; that American troops invaded and occupied a nation is something that definitely is a break from past policies. But Bacevich opines otherwise, at least for Bush's first year, finding instead continuities with Democratic policies in the Republican successor.

It appears that while an empire does not exist in the formal, classical sense, the United States has become an imperial power, perhaps possessing what Stephen Peter Rosen has labeled an "indirect-empire." In this sense, the defining moments in recent times have been the fall of the Berlin wall and September 11. In a recent article, Bacevich wrote, "the future of the American Empire promises to be a bloody one."[2] This would depend on how many fronts American policy makers wish to engage with and contain; more importantly, how many of these would be taken to their logical conclusion, or would we have the discredited leaders of the Taliban and Al Qaeda also enjoying this dose of freedom along with the other legitimized dictators under U.S. patronage?

The comparison of this potential American empire as a successor to the British empire is a valid intellectual question, but only if policy makers understood the historical lesson that no empire lasts forever. A reader is tempted to ponder many questions: can America really carve out a territorial empire? Or do we need to redefine the very concept of empire in a time when the world is opening, wiring up, and shrinking to a global village? Is the American model of freedom and liberty the only valid one? Are the American values the only ones worth cherishing?

More than this, the conquest of hearts and minds of people throughout the world for cherishing the American dream of liberty–the "soft" imperialism (a dimension not touched on by Bacevich)–is perhaps already a reality. The next generation in different parts of the world already sees America as a model of emulation. The American language, jobs in American trans-national corporations, the use of American brands as status symbols, American fast food chains, American soap operas, American televisions beaming live wars as entertainment shows, and Hollywood have already bowled over the world. Moreover, perpetual dissenters such as Noam Chomsky constantly feed the intellectual curiosity of those opposed to America. For that matter, Professor Bacevich's perspicacious analysis is a good intellectual feed for those who wish to have an informed, non-rhetorical perspective on U.S. foreign policy in contemporary times.

Notes

[1]. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 805.

[2]. Andrew Bacevich, "Does Empire Pay? " *Historically Speaking: The Bulletin of the Historical Society* 4:4 (April 2003), p. 33.

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Citation: Anup Mukherjee. Review of Bacevich, Andrew J., *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*. H-USA, H-Net Reviews. May, 2003.

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