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# A Warning to Africa: The New U.S. Imperial Grand Strategy

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Imperialism is constant for capitalism. But it passes through various phases as the system evolves. At present the world is experiencing a new age of imperialism marked by a U.S. grand strategy of global domination. One indication of how things have changed is that the U.S. military is now truly global in its operations with permanent bases on every continent, including Africa, where a new scramble for control is taking place focused on oil.

Elite opinion in the United States in the decade immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union often decried the absence of a U.S. grand strategy comparable to what George Kennan labeled "containment," under the mantle of which the United States intervened throughout the Cold War years. The key question, as posed in November 2000 by national-security analyst Richard Haass, was that of determining how the United States should utilize its current "surplus of power" to reshape the world. Haass's answer, which doubtless contributed to his being hired immediately after as director of policy planning for Colin Powell's State Department in the new Bush administration, was to promote an "Imperial America" strategy aimed at securing U.S. global dominance for decades to come. Only months before, a similar, if even more nakedly militaristic, grand strategy had been presented by the Project for the New American Century, in a report authored by future top Bush-administration figures Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Lewis Libby, among others.1

This new imperial grand strategy became a reality, following the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq—and was soon officially enshrined in the White House's *National Security Strategy* statement of 2002. Summing up the new imperial thrust in *Harvard Magazine*, Stephen Peter Rosen, director of the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard and a founding member of the Project for the New American Century, wrote:

> A political unit that has overwhelming superiority in military power, and uses that power to influence the internal behavior of other states, is called an empire. Because the United States does not seek to control territory or govern the overseas citizens of the empire, we are an indirect empire, to be sure, but an empire nonetheless. If this is correct, our goal is not combating a rival, but maintaining our imperial position, and maintaining imperial order. Planning for imperial wars is different from planning for conventional international wars....Imperial wars to restore order are not so constrained [by deterrence considerations]. The maximum amount of force can and should be used as quickly as possible for psychological impact—to demonstrate that the empire cannot be challenged with impunity....[I]mperial strategy focuses on

> preventing the emergence of powerful, hostile challengers to the empire: by war if necessary, but by imperial assimilation if possible.2

Commenting in late 2002 in *Foreign Policy*, John Lewis Gaddis, professor of military and naval history at Yale, stated that the goal of the impending war on Iraq was one of inflicting an "Agincourt on the banks of the Euphrates." This would be a demonstration of power so great that, as in Henry V's famous fifteenth-century victory in France, the geopolitical landscape would be changed for decades to come. What was ultimately at issue, according to Gaddis, was "the management of the international system by a single hegemon"—the United States. This securing of hegemony over the entire world by the United States by means of preemptive actions was, he contended, nothing less than "a new grand strategy of transformation."3

**The Nature of Grand Strategy**

Since the time of Clausewitz, tactics has been designated in military circles as "the art of using troops in battle"; strategy as "the art of using battles to win the war."4 In contrast, the idea of "grand strategy" as classically promoted by military strategists and historians, such as Edward Meade Earle and B. H. Liddell Hart, refers to the integration of the war-making potential of a state with its larger political-economic ends. As historian Paul Kennedy observed in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (1991): "a true grand strategy" is "concerned with peace as much as (perhaps even more than) with war….about the evolution or integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even for centuries."5

Grand strategies are geopolitical in orientation, geared to domination of whole geographical regions—including strategic resources such as minerals and waterways, economic assets, populations, and vital military positions. The most successful grand strategies of the past are seen as those of long-standing empires, which have been able to maintain their power over large geographical expanses for extended periods of time. Hence, historians of grand strategy commonly focus on the nineteenth-century British Empire (Pax Britannica) and even the ancient Roman Empire (Pax Romana).

For the United States today what is at stake is no longer control of a mere portion of the globe, but a truly global Pax Americana. Although some commentators have seen the latest U.S. imperial thrust as the work of a small cabal of neoconservatives within the Bush administration, the reality is one of broad concurrence within the U.S. power structure on the necessity of expanding the U.S. empire. One recent collection, including contributions by administration critics, is entitled *The Obligation of Empire: United States' Grand Strategy for a New Century*.6

Ivo. H. Daalder (senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and former foreign policy advisor to Howard Dean) and James M. Lindsay (vice president of the Council on Foreign Relations, previously employed by Clinton's National Security Council) argue in their book *America Unbound* that the United States has long had a "secret empire," disguised by multilateralism. The Bush White House's unilateral policy of building "empire on American power alone" has changed things only to the extent that it has stripped away the empire's hidden character and reduced its overall force by relying less on vassal states. According to Daalder and Lindsay, the United States is now under the command of "hegemonist" thinkers who want to ensure that the United States dominates the entire globe—both in its own national self-interest and in order to reshape the world in tune with "democratic imperialism." But such an aggressive posture, they point out, is not outside the historic

range of U.S. policy. A unilateralist imperial thrust can be traced back to Theodore Roosevelt and was present from the beginning of the Cold War era in the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Still, Daalder and Lindsay hold out the possibility of a more cooperative strategy, with the other great powers falling in behind the United States, as a superior approach to running an empire.7

Such cooperative imperialism, however, becomes more difficult to achieve once the hegemon's power begins to wane. Not only is the United States suffering increased economic competition, but with the demise of the Soviet Union the NATO alliance has weakened: Washington's European vassals do not always follow its lead, even though they are unable to challenge it directly. The temptation facing a waning hegemonic power—still armed and dangerous—caught in such circumstances is to attempt to rebuild and even expand its power by acting unilaterally and monopolizing the spoils.

**The War for the 'New American Century'**

Capitalism is a system that is worldwide in its economic scope but divided politically into competing states that develop economically at different rates. The contradiction of uneven capitalist development was classically expressed by Lenin in 1916 in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*:

> There can be no other conceivable basis under capitalism for the division of spheres of influence, of interests, of colonies, etc., than a calculation of the strength of the participants in the division, their general economic, financial, military strength, etc. And the strength of these participants in the division does not change to an equal degree, for under capitalism the development of different undertakings, trusts, branches of industry, or countries cannot be even. Half a century ago, Germany was a miserable, insignificant country, as far as its capitalist strength was concerned, compared with the strength of England at that time. Japan was similarly insignificant compared with Russia. Is it "conceivable" that in ten or twenty years' time the relative strength of the imperialist powers will have remained unchanged? Absolutely inconceivable.8

It is now widely acknowledged that the world is undergoing a global economic transformation. Not only is the growth rate of the world economy as a whole slowing, but the relative economic strength of the United States is continuing to weaken. In 1950 the United States accounted for about half of world GDP, falling to a little over a fifth by 2003. Likewise it accounted for almost half of the world's stock of global foreign direct investment in 1960, compared to a little over 20 percent at the beginning of this century. According to projections of Goldman Sachs, China could overtake the United States as the world's largest economy by 2039.9

This growing threat to U.S. power is fueling Washington's obsession with laying the groundwork for a "New American Century." Its current interventionism is aimed at taking advantage of its present short-term economic and military primacy to secure strategic assets that will provide long-term guarantees of global supremacy. The goal is to extend U.S. power directly while depriving potential competitors of those vital strategic assets that might allow them eventually to challenge it globally or even within particular regions.

*The National Security Strategy of the United States* of 2002 gave notice that "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." But grand strategy

extends beyond mere military power. Economic advantages vis-à-vis potential rivals are the real coin of intercapitalist competition. Hence, U.S. grand strategy integrates military power with the struggle to control capital, trade, the value of the dollar, and strategic raw materials.

Perhaps the clearest ordering of U.S. strategic objectives has been provided by Robert J. Art, professor of international relations at Brandeis and a research associate of the Olin Institute, in *A Grand Strategy for America*. "A grand strategy," he writes, "tells a nation's leaders what goals they should aim for and how best they can use their country's military power to attain these goals." In conceptualizing such a grand strategy for the Untied States, Art presents six "overarching national interests" in order of importance:

- First, prevent an attack on the American homeland;
- Second, prevent great-power Eurasian wars and, if possible, the intense security competitions that make them more likely;
- Third, preserve access to a reasonably priced and secure supply of oil;
- Fourth, preserve an open international economic order;
- Fifth, foster the spread of democracy and respect for human rights abroad, and prevent genocide or mass murder in civil wars;
- Sixth, protect the global environment, especially from the adverse effects of global warming and severe climate change.

After national defense proper, i.e., defense of "the homeland" against external attack, the next three highest strategic priorities are thus: (1) the traditional geopolitical goal of hegemony over the Eurasian heartland seen as the key to world power, (2) securing control over world oil supplies, and (3) promoting global-capitalist economic relations.

In order to meet these objectives, Art contends, Washington should "maintain forward-based forces" in Europe and East Asia (the two rimlands of Eurasia with great power concentrations) and in the Persian Gulf (containing the bulk of world oil reserves). "Eurasia is home to most of the world's people, most of its proven oil reserves, and most of its military powers, as well as a large share of its economic growth." It is therefore crucial that the U.S. imperial grand strategy be aimed at strengthening its hegemony in this region, beginning with the key oil regions of South-Central Asia.10

With the wars on and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq still unresolved, Washington has been stepping-up its threats of a "preemptive" attack on these states' more powerful neighbor, Iran. The main justification offered for this is Iran's uranium-enrichment program, which could eventually allow it to develop nuclear weapons capabilities. Yet, there are other reasons that the United States is interested in Iran. Like Iraq before it, Iran is a leading oil power, now with the second largest proven oil reserves behind Saudi Arabia and ahead of Iraq. Control of Iran is thus crucial to Washington's goal of dominating the Persian Gulf and its oil.

Iran's geopolitical importance, moreover, stretches far beyond the Middle East. It is a key

prize (as in the case also of Afghanistan) in the New Great Game for control of all of South-Central Asia, including the Caspian Sea Basin with its enormous fossil fuel reserves. U.S. strategic planners are obsessed with fears of an Asian energy-security grid, in which Russia, China, Iran, and the Central Asian countries (possibly also including Japan) would come together economically and in an energy accord to break the U.S. and Western stranglehold on the world oil and gas market—creating the basis for a general shift of world power to the East. At present China, the world's fastest growing economy, lacks energy security even as its demand for fossil fuels is rapidly mounting. It is attempting to solve this partly through greater access to the energy resources of Iran and the Central Asian states. Recent U.S. attempts to establish a stronger alliance with India, with Washington bolstering India's status as a nuclear power, are clearly part of this New Great Game for control of South-Central Asia—reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Great Game between Britain and Russia for control of this part of Asia.11

**The New Scramble for Africa**

If there is a New Great Game afoot in Asia there is also a "New Scramble for Africa" on the part of the great powers.12 *The National Security Strategy of the United States* of 2002 declared that "combating global terror" and ensuring U.S. energy security required that the United States increase its commitments to Africa and called upon "coalitions of the willing" to generate regional security arrangements on that continent. Soon after the U.S. European Command, based in Stuttgart, Germany—in charge of U.S. military operations in Sub-Saharan Africa—increased its activities in West Africa, centering on those states with substantial oil production and/or reserves in or around the Gulf of Guinea (stretching roughly from the Ivory Coast to Angola). The U.S. military's European Command now devotes 70 percent of its time to African affairs, up from almost nothing as recently as 2003.13

As pointed out by Richard Haass, now president of the Council on Foreign Relations, in his foreword to the 2005 council report entitled *More Than Humanitarianism: A Strategic U.S. Approach Toward Africa*: "By the end of the decade sub-Saharan Africa is likely to become as important as a source of U.S. energy imports as the Middle East."14 West Africa has some 60 billion barrels of proven oil reserves. Its oil is the low sulfur, sweet crude prized by the U.S. economy. U.S. agencies and think tanks project that one in every five new barrels of oil entering the global economy in the latter half of this decade will come from the Gulf of Guinea, raising its share of U.S. oil imports from 15 to over 20 percent by 2010, and 25 percent by 2015. Nigeria already supplies the United States with 10 percent of its imported oil. Angola provides 4 percent of U.S. oil imports, which could double by the end of the decade. The discovery of new reserves and the expansion of oil production are turning other states in the region into major oil exporters, including Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Principe, Gabon, Cameroon, and Chad. Mauritania is scheduled to emerge as an oil exporter by 2007. Sudan, bordering the Red Sea in the east and Chad to the west, is an important oil producer.

At present the main, permanent U.S. military base in Africa is the one established in 2002 in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, giving the United States strategic control of the maritime zone through which a quarter of the world's oil production passes. The Djibouti base is also in close proximity to the Sudanese oil pipeline. (The French military has long had a major presence in Djibouti and also has an air base at Abeche, Chad on the Sudanese border.) The Djibouti base allows the United States to dominate the eastern end of the broad oil swath cutting across Africa that it now considers vital to its strategic interests—a vast strip running southwest from the 994-mile Higleig-Port Sudan oil pipeline in the east to the 640-mile

Chad-Cameroon pipeline and the Gulf of Guinea in the West. A new U.S. forward-operating location in Uganda gives the United States the potential of dominating southern Sudan, where most of that country's oil is to be found.

In West Africa, the U.S. military's European Command has now established forward-operating locations in Senegal, Mali, Ghana, and Gabon—as well as Namibia, bordering Angola on the south—involving the upgrading of airfields, the pre-positioning of critical supplies and fuel, and access agreements for swift deployment of U.S. troops.15 In 2003 it launched a counterterrorism program in West Africa, and in March 2004 U.S. Special Forces were directly involved in a military operation with Sahel countries against the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat—on Washington's list of terrorist organizations. The U.S. European Command is developing a coastal security system in the Gulf of Guinea called the Gulf of Guinea Guard. It has also been planning the construction of a U.S. naval base in São Tomé and Principe, which the European Command has intimated could rival the U.S. naval base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. The Pentagon is thus moving aggressively to establish a military presence in the Gulf of Guinea that will allow it to control the western part of the broad trans-Africa oil strip and the vital oil reserves now being discovered there. Operation Flintlock, a start-up U.S. military exercise in West Africa in 2005, incorporated 1,000 U.S. Special Forces. The U.S. European Command will be conducting exercises for its new rapid-reaction force for the Gulf of Guinea this summer.

Here the flag is following trade: the major U.S. and Western oil corporations are all scrambling for West African oil and demanding security. The U.S. military's European Command, the *Wall Street Journal* reported in its April 25th issue, is also working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to expand the role of U.S. corporations in Africa as part of an "integrated U.S. response." In this economic scramble for Africa's petroleum resources the old colonial powers, Britain and France, are in competition with the United States. Militarily, however, they are working closely with the United States to secure Western imperial control of the region.

The U.S. military buildup in Africa is frequently justified as necessary both to fight terrorism and to counter growing instability in the oil region of Sub-Saharan Africa. Since 2003 Sudan has been torn by civil war and ethnic conflict focused on its southwestern Darfur region (where much of the country's oil is located), resulting in innumerable human rights violations and mass killings by government-linked militia forces against the population of the region. Attempted coups recently occurred in the new petrostates of São Tomé and Principe (2003) and Equatorial Guinea (2004). Chad, which is run by a brutally oppressive regime shielded by a security and intelligence apparatus backed by the United States, also experienced an attempted coup in 2004. A successful coup took place in Mauritania in 2005 against U.S.-supported strongman Ely Ould Mohamed Taya. Angola's three-decade-long civil war—instigated and fueled by the United States, which together with South Africa organized the terrorist army under Jonas Savimbi's UNITA—lasted until the ceasefire following Savimbi's death in 2002. Nigeria, the regional hegemon, is rife with corruption, revolts, and organized oil theft, with considerable portions of oil production in the Niger Delta region being siphoned off—up to 300,000 barrels a day in early 2004.16 The rise of armed insurgency in the Niger Delta and the potential of conflict between the Islamic north and non-Islamic south of the country are major U.S. concerns.

Hence there are incessant calls and no lack of seeming justifications for U.S. "humanitarian interventions" in Africa. The Council on Foreign Relations report *More than Humanitarianism* insists that "the United States and its allies must be ready to take appropriate action" in

Darfur in Sudan "including sanctions and, if necessary, military intervention, if the Security Council is blocked from doing so." Meanwhile the notion that the U.S. military might before long need to intervene in Nigeria is being widely floated among pundits and in policy circles. *Atlantic Monthly* correspondent Jeffrey Taylor wrote in April 2006 that Nigeria has become "the largest failed state on earth," and that a further destabilization of that state, or its takeover by radical Islamic forces, would endanger "the abundant oil reserves that America has vowed to protect. Should that day come, it would herald a military intervention far more massive than the Iraqi campaign."17

Still, U.S. grand strategists are clear that the real issues are not the African states themselves and the welfare of their populations but oil and China's growing presence in Africa. As the *Wall Street Journal* noted in "Africa Emerges as a Strategic Battlefield," "China has made Africa a front line in its pursuit of more global influence, tripling trade with the continent to some $37 billion over the last five years and locking up energy assets, closing trade deals with regimes like Sudan's and educating Africa's future elites at Chinese universities and military schools." In *More than Humanitarianism,* the Council on Foreign Relations likewise depicts the leading threat as coming from China: "China has altered the strategic context in Africa. All across Africa today, China is acquiring control of natural resource assets, outbidding Western contractors on major infrastructure projects, and providing soft loans and other incentives to bolster its competitive advantage."18 China imports more than a quarter of its oil from Africa, primarily Angola, Sudan, and Congo. It is Sudan's largest foreign investor. It has provided heavy subsidies to Nigeria to increase its influence and has been selling fighter jets there. Most threatening from the standpoint of U.S. grand strategists is China's $2 billion low-interest loan to Angola in 2004, which has allowed Angola to withstand IMF demands to reshape its economy and society along neoliberal lines.

For the Council on Foreign Relations, all of this adds up to nothing less than a threat to Western imperialist control of Africa. Given China's role, the council report says, "the United States and Europe cannot consider Africa their *chasse gardé* [private hunting ground], as the French once saw francophone Africa. The rules are changing as China seeks not only to gain access to resources, but also to control resource production and distribution, perhaps positioning itself for priority access as these resources become scarcer." The council report on Africa is so concerned with combating China through the expansion of U.S. military operations in the region, that none other than Chester Crocker, former assistant secretary of state for African affairs in the Reagan administration, charges it with sounding "wistfully nostalgic for an era when the United States or the West was the only major influence and could pursue its…objectives with a free hand."19

What is certain is that the U.S empire is being enlarged to encompass parts of Africa in the rapacious search for oil. The results could be devastating for Africa's peoples. Like the old scramble for Africa this new one is a struggle among great powers for resources and plunder—not for the development of Africa or the welfare of its population.

**A Grand Strategy of Enlargement**

Despite the rapidly evolving strategic context and the shift to a more naked imperialism in recent years, there is a consistency in U.S. imperial grand strategy, which derives from the broad agreement at the very top of the U.S. power structure that the United States should seek "global supremacy," as President Jimmy Carter's former National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski put it.20

The Council on Foreign Relations' 2006 report on *More Than Humanitarianism*, which supports the enlargement of U.S. grand strategy to take in Africa, was cochaired by Anthony Lake, National Security Advisor to Clinton from 1993–1997 and Christine Todd Whitman, former head of the Environmental Protection Agency under Bush. As Clinton's National Security Advisor, Lake played a leading role in defining the U.S. grand strategy in the Clinton administration. In a speech entitled "From Containment to Enlargement," delivered to the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University on September 21, 2003, he declared that with the collapse of the Soviet Union the United States was the world's "dominant power…we have the world's strongest military, its largest economy and its most dynamic, multiethnic society.…We contained a global threat to market democracies; now we should seek to enlarge, their reach. The successor to a doctrine of containment must be a strategy of enlargement." Translated this meant an expansion of the sphere of world capitalism under the U.S. military-strategic umbrella. The chief enemies of this new world order were characterized by Lake as the "backlash states," especially Iraq and Iran. Lake's insistence, in the early Clinton era, on a grand "strategy of enlargement" for the United States is being realized today in the enlargement of the U.S. military role not only in Central Asia and the Middle East, but also in Africa.21

U.S. imperial grand strategy is less a product of policies generated in Washington by this or that wing of the ruling class, than an inevitable result of the power position that U.S. capitalism finds itself in at the commencement of the twenty-first century. U.S. economic strength (along with that of its closest allies) has been ebbing fairly steadily. The great powers are not likely to stand in the same relation to each other economically two decades hence. At the same time U.S. world military power has increased relatively with the demise of the Soviet Union. The United States now accounts for about half of all of the world's military spending—a proportion two or more times its share of world output.

The goal of the new U.S. imperial grand strategy is to use this unprecedented military strength to preempt emerging historical forces by creating a sphere of full-spectrum dominance so vast, now encompassing every continent, that no potential rivals will be able to challenge the United States decades down the line. This is a war against the peoples of the periphery of the capitalist world and for the expansion of world capitalism, particularly U.S. capitalism. But it is also a war to secure a "New American Century" in which third world nations are viewed as "strategic assets" within a larger global geopolitical struggle

The lessons of history are clear: attempts to gain world dominance by military means, though inevitable under capitalism, are destined to fail and can only lead to new and greater wars. It is the responsibility of those committed to world peace to resist the new U.S. imperial grand strategy by calling into question imperialism and its economic taproot: capitalism itself.

**Notes**

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13. Fred Kempe, "Africa Emerges as a Strategic Battlefield," *Wall Street Journal*, April 25, 2006.

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15. Council on Foreign Relations, *More Than Humanitarianism*, 59.

16. Center for Strategic and International Studies, *A Strategic U.S. Approach to Governance and Security in the Gulf of Guinea*, July 2005, 3.

17. Council on Foreign Relations, *More Than Humanitarianism*, 24, 133; Jeffrey Taylor, "Worse Than Iraq?," *Atlantic*, April 2006, 33–34.

18. Council on Foreign Relations, *More Than Humanitarianism*, 40.

19. Council on Foreign Relations, *More Than Humanitarianism*, 52–53, 131.

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21. Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," speech to School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, September 21, 2003, http://www.mtholyoke.ed/.

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