

Chapter 1 Endgame Geographies

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“World domination, the same old story. The world is full of people who think they are Napoleon or God.”

Sean Connery as James Bond, *Dr. No*, 1962

Baghdad, April 9, 2003. With the cameras of the global media excitedly in place, the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein begins. Several dozen jubilant Iraqi men throng around the base while a US marine scales the statue and drapes Saddam’s head with a large Stars and Stripes. It remains there for a few minutes while a jib and chain from a US half-track tank are attached to Hussein’s neck. Another climber replaces the red, white and blue with an Iraqi flag. The statue is soon pulled over, bending to the plaza floor amid cheers all around. Beamed across the world, this image quickly became iconic of the end of Iraq’s dictatorship and the imminent victory of the massive US-led invasion force. Endgame Saddam.

If the orchestration of this photo op by US marines was readily apparent, the contradictions it expressed may have been less so. Washington always forcefully insisted that this was a war and invasion carried out by an international coalition not simply the United States, and yet for US marines in Baghdad their own national symbol was an appropriate even natural symbol of victory for global good. The nascent contradiction between narrow nationalist interests on the one hand and the claim to embody global right on the other was neither accidental nor arbitrary but tapped deep and long-held aspirations for an American globalism. If the exuberance of the moment swept away all such public recognition, US marine colonels on the eve of war were much more astute. Anticipating the revelatory power of just such a scenario, they had quietly but firmly frowned on nationalist ostentation, ordering the flag kept under wraps. Its appearance on Saddam’s head anyway was widely understood around the world as a more triumphalist kind of endgame, an increasingly accomplished US political and economic hegemony in the world: endgame global America.

The substitution of the Iraqi for the American flag on Saddam’s head opened the prospect of an alternative however. It was initially met with a certain patronizing jollity – “isn’t that nice for the poor Iraqis who now have their country back” – but in retrospect, as war and invasion turned into quagmire and continuous civil strife, this scene may yet prove to have a more prophetic meaning. Rather than buttressing America’s enthronement as political, economic and military hegemon, opposition to the war and subsequent occupation of Iraq may well provoke a

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different result: “endgame lost.”¹

Iraq 1920/2005

Prior to 1920, Iraq did not exist. It was created that year as a British mandate after a bitter contest over the area’s future and ultimately became an independent nation-state in 1932. Three quarters of a century later, it lost that sovereignty after a US-led invasion, and today it sits as the epicenter around which future US global power will be arbitrated.

Consolidated in the wake of World War I from three provinces in the crumbling Ottoman Empire – Basra, Baghdad and Mosul – the new state was administered under League of Nations mandate. The British administration was predictably dismissive of local ambitions and demands, and in early 1920 opposition grew, especially among the southern Shi’a who had been suppressed by the Ottomans in favor of the northern Sunnis. The British were bent on repeating the Ottoman divide-and-conquer strategy, but they were challenged by a Shi’a-led coalition seeking Iraqi independence. After a series of demonstrations and violent revolts against British occupation, full-scale armed uprising broke out in June 1920. The Kurds piled on, rising against a resurgent Turkish military which threatened a reprise of Ottoman control in Kurdish towns and terrain. The jerry-rigged nation-state, it was clear, would be difficult to manage, and the British military responded forcefully. Over several months they suppressed the Iraqi revolt at the cost of an estimated 6,000 Iraqi lives and approximately 500 Indian and British troops.

The similarities with 2004 are significant except that the more recent invasion is American-led rather than British, it is more deadly, and it is more prolonged, but probably just as futile. More than 1,000 US troops were killed in less than eighteen months, and the number of Iraqi fatalities quickly doubled the 1920 toll as civil strife spiraled out of control. An interim government was widely recognized as a puppet for US power which, with 135,000 - 150,000 troops on the ground, has been unable to pacify the country, indeed was forced to retreat from several large cities, and faces a growing crisis. Like the British after 1920, the US wants control of Iraq at arm’s length. Ideally they would like to extract themselves, but like the British again they hardly know how to accomplish this as the mess of occupation magnifies.

The historical geography of the 1920 uprising is instructive. From bases in India, Britain had invaded the southern city of Basra in late 1914 after the Ottoman Empire joined Germany and the other “Central Powers” at the advent of World War I. Their “military expedition” sought to break almost four centuries of Ottoman power over the region – an Asian continuation of long term European efforts against Muslim powers. After serious military setbacks the British eventually took Baghdad in March 1917 and Mosul a year later. Meanwhile the evanescent 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement between the colonial powers of Britain and France envisaged a division of the Ottoman Middle East: the French would take much of present-day Syria while the British claimed prerogative over a possibly independent Palestine and control of the TransJordan, as it was then known, together with the 3 provinces that eventually became Iraq (including latter-day Kuwait). While giving lip-service to the possibility of independence, the British moved to control these new territories from Delhi as much as from London. The new regional borders were still amorphous, and the British refused to allow an official Iraqi delegation to be represented at the all-important Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

United under British rule, leaders in the three provinces cautiously forged closer political

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ties among the Shi'a of the south, the favored Sunnis based largely in and around Baghdad and the North, and the Kurds from Mosul and the Turkish borderlands in the northeast. Then as now, the majority Shi'a anticipated taking control – that the elite Sunni, who had enjoyed greater influence under the Ottoman state, would be sidelined. But that did not happen. Shi'a tribal leaders, who enjoyed longstanding local loyalty based on relations of land ownership, water rights, the authority to tax, and religious fealty, were themselves marginalized.

A March 1921 conference in Cairo was organized and controlled by that billy-goat-gruff of the British empire, then colonial secretary Winston Churchill, and numerous Arab officials from the region also attended. It mandated that a separate territory of Iraq would become a kingdom and that Faisal, the Hashemite Amir, would be placed on the throne. Faisal had little immediate connection to the three provinces – his father had been the sharif of distant Mecca in present-day Saudi Arabia – but he was recommended by his leadership of the so-called “Arab Revolt” which sided in the war with the invading British against the traditional Ottoman occupier. A significant if sometimes reluctant British ally, Faisal was more than a puppet but hardly more than “sovereign of a state that itself was not sovereign.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Iraqis were broadly opposed to the British mandate, not just in the center but at the edges. In 1922 the Turkish military, vanquished in the war, moved back into the Kurdish area of Mosul, and the British overseeing the territory, letting it discipline the Kurds before responding with Royal Air Force indignation. The British not only routed the Turks, but in 1924 forced the local Kurdish leader into Persian exile. Hopes for an autonomous Kurdistan waned as the British and Turks effectively split the Kurds between Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Various treaties throughout the 1920s established Iraq's geographical boundaries vis-à-vis its six neighbors, producing the tell-tale straight lines of imperial imposition on the region's map.

Their imperialism facing exhaustion, the British slowly realized in the 1920s that they could not control the new Iraq. The old strategy of territorial control was bankrupt, but control at arm's length was a different matter, and a series of assemblies and parliaments beholden to London was organized. While they pushed for Iraqi entry into the League of Nations – a stamp of global legitimacy – the British also worked their economic interests. German and Ottoman shares in the Turkish Petroleum Company, which had located large oil reserves, were already liquidated, and the British grabbed and reorganized corporate ownership of Iraqi oil in favor of British capital (47.5% shared equally between Royal Dutch Shell and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company [later British Petroleum – BP]). The French, in compensation for their acquiescence over Jordan and Palestine, received 23.75% and the Americans another 23.75% (shared equally between Standard Oil of New Jersey and Mobil). Despite a 1920 promise, the British thereby froze the Iraqis out of any real control – 5% was left – over their own oil, in lieu of royalty payments. Oil was tapped in Kirkuk in 1927 and a pipeline to the Mediterranean was completed eight years later. With the oil agreement in place, a new Anglo-Iraqi treaty in 1930, announced the end of the British mandate and Iraqi independence.

While getting some of what they wanted the British realized the need to get out of an Iraq that they sensed would be impervious to external control. And they were eventually successful in retaining significant economic control of new, vast and growing oil resources without the headaches of political and territorial control. There was of course much intervening history, but essentially the same dilemma faced the United States after 2004. Again, many Iraqis have not

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been entirely antagonistic to a foreign-sponsored intervention, this time aimed at overthrowing a widely despised dictator. And again the crucial question becomes how to amalgamate disparate political, geographical and religious groups into some kind of national unity, or else how to organize an alternative.

Much like the British in 1920, the United States today struggles to establish territorial control and promote a favorable local regime that will support US economic prerogatives. The Bush administration -- at least its dominant Defense wing -- evidently believed that the military overthrow of Hussein would be the hard part and that flowers and kisses for invading troops would grease the wheels of an effortless reconstruction of comprador power. The comparisons with 1920 are again instructive. The US administration has been astonishingly naive in believing that the Iraqi population would cede national control to an invading power that breathes the flames of imperial ambition – a self-described “crusade” – in the Middle East. As one historian wrote of the British in 1920: “Once in, it was difficult to get out.”ⁱⁱⁱ

‘We Are All Americans Now’

The powering of commercial planes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001 were highly local events yet at the same time utterly global. They certainly elicited a global response. Sympathy for the immediate victims – more than 2,700 New Yorkers hailing from some 90 countries, 180 military personnel and employees in Washington DC, and 40 people on a downed plane in Pennsylvania – came from everywhere as the gruesome results of the attacks played out in real time on television and computer screens around the world. From Seoul to Cairo, Moscow to Santiago and throughout the Middle East, there were candle-lit vigils and other sympathetic demonstrations deploring the attacks on New York and Washington. Horror mixed with widespread apprehension over the embarrassing ease of the attacks. That they seemed to come from nowhere raised the specter of a sudden escalation of terrorist threats from which no-one was safe. Especially for those who had traveled to New York – less so the antiseptic space around the Pentagon – the depth of global empathy with the United States was extraordinary. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, reciprocating the cross-border Cold War comradeship of John F. Kennedy four decades earlier (“Ich bin ein Berliner”), expressed the new sense of global vulnerability and affinity in the same terms: “we are all Americans now.” “We are all Americans,” insisted the September 12th 2001 banner headline in the French newspaper, *Le Monde*.

In some strange way we *were* all Americans after September 11th 2001. But how and why? Certainly not because September 11th was in any way the most deadly act of terrorism we have known or because it claimed an inordinate number of lives in the annals of human violence: after the ethnic cleansing of Bosnia and Kosovo in the early 1990s we were not all suddenly oppressed Muslims; after the Central African genocide of the mid-1990s at the expense of perhaps 700,000 lives the citizens of the world did not all become Tutsis; nor did we become Timorese nor Palestinians nor Guatemalan peasants. After the horrific bombing of trains in Madrid in 2004, we did not all become Spaniards, nor Russians after Beslan. A certain racism – perhaps more accurately a sense of some differential value of citizens from different groups, countries or hemispheres – surely framed some of the differential response to September 11th, and the global power of US-owned and controlled media, for whose executives these events were

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obviously highly personal, accentuated the response. Certainly too the spectacular nature of the attacks – the targets, execution, symbolism and instantaneous worldwide transmission of the falling towers – seared them into our global imagination. After all, the United States stood as the world’s remaining superpower, apparently inviolate, assuredly powerful, yet suddenly and somehow an underdog in a fight few perceived it was even in. But this remains only a partial account. Just as powerful is the close connection that many people feel around the world to the expression of “America” – quite distinct from the US government – as a place where they might also experience a different kind of life, temporarily or permanently, in practice or vicariously. This ideology is as old as it is powerful in the modern world and it was very easily called up, both deliberately and spontaneously, by the events of 2001 and by responses to them. The wound of September 11th was also a wound to this psychic comfort afforded across national and cultural borders. It spoke to us all just as the Stars and Stripes over Saddam’s head was meant to do 19 months later.

To say this is not to succumb to right-wing and nationalist ideologies about American greatness -- love it or leave it -- nor does it confuse the power of the myth for the less salubrious reality of millions of people’s daily lives inside and outside the United States. The mythology of America sits uncomfortably with the reality of 36 million people, disproportionately minorities, living in poverty within its own boundaries. But it does suggest the importance of such deep-seated global desires attached to this specific, territorially circumscribed, national space – and its idea. It therefore also helps us to gain a perspective on the astonishing fact that the reception of the United States on the global stage was virtually reversed in only a few months after 2001. People around the world protested the US administration’s blundering war against Afghanistan, the bloody war and failed occupation in Iraq, the refusal of the US administration to heed the wishes and procedures of the United Nations – indeed the deliberate humiliation of that body – and Washington’s unilateralism in the economic, political, social and environmental spheres. If there is a rogue state on the loose, a broad global consensus seemed to conclude, it is America’s Bush administration. Even in Britain, the main ally of the United States in this period, a majority of people saw the United States as a greater threat to global peace than Al Qaeda.

In an extraordinary reversal of global public opinion, “We are all Americans” morphed quickly into an outright global opposition to the Bush administration’s arrogant unilateralism. Virtually in unison, reporters and politicians chose to interpret such rising criticism of the administration and its war policies as anti-Americanism. “Aren’t we the good guys, the world’s saviors?” was the implied tone of faux innocence. A popular howl was raised against the Germans, Russians and especially the French, and at the nadir of this petulant, reactionary nationalism, French wine was poured down many an American sink while french fries became “freedom fries” in US Congress cafeterias.

That some deep-seated anti-Americanism did and does exist should not blind us to the convenient slippage by media and government confusing American government policy on the one side and America the people and the place on the other. Most people around the world are far more astute in making that distinction and repugnance at the US war in Iraq is not the same as anti-Americanism. (The popular French response to freedom fries was whimsical, uncomprehending curiosity.) The cry of anti-Americanism in fact deflects global responsibility, provides a self-justifying refusal to comprehend US imperial complicity. This is the flip side of

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the deep personal identification many feel with “America” but manifestly not with the American state. The US behaving badly poses a visceral challenge to that affinity, and as with Vietnam, people around the world – much like many Americans themselves – feel that a warmongering US administration has betrayed them, taken “their” America from them.

There was nothing inevitable about the squandering of global magnanimity toward the US after 2001. But it was not unpredictable either, and its causes go much deeper than simply the reactionary pugilism of the Bush administration. A deep continuity connects US global ambition from the 18th to the 21st century, and it has helped to mold the long term economic and cultural as much as political policy of successive US administrations, Republican and Democratic alike. As I hope to show in this book, the wars since 2001 – in Palestine/Israel as much as Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as older smoldering conflicts from Colombia to Indonesia – should be seen less as moral crusades against terrorism, and more as an expression of what I called at the beginning “endgame global America,” the culmination of a US-centered (but *not exclusively American*) political and economic globalization. They represent the political face of globalization, leading to nothing less than a US-centered global hegemony.

Put geographically, there is a trenchant contradiction between on the one hand the global promise of a certain kind of Americanism, to which people around the world can readily relate and invest in – the promise, and for no small few, the reality of a comfortable life – and on the other hand the exclusionary, elite and nationalist self-interest espoused as an integral part of this Americanism. The latter represent a raft of global and simultaneously local practices that are experienced by millions around the world (including many millions in the US itself) as repressive, exploitative, vindictive, even life-threatening. US military repression, support for despotic regimes, unemployment, and the poverty wages as well as dangerous work conditions experienced in many US multinational firms, their subsidiaries and contractors are despised worldwide even as the dream of America remains alive. For conservatives, this contradiction is generally wished away: the reality of US-sponsored repression or exploitation is either denied or excused as an exception to the norm, or else it is justified as a pragmatic necessity for the defeat of nefarious enemies: the American dream is cordoned off from reality. Liberals, by contrast, traditionally fold the contradiction into a narrative of realities versus ideals and focus on a moral parsing of specific events and episodes, sorting apart the regrettable failings of the ideal, the causes thereof and their implications. Wishing the contradiction into either the realm of human nature or that of philosophical inevitability, the liberal response too protects the ideal. The purpose of this book is to provide an alternative perspective, rooted in a historico-geographical reading of US global power and its contradictions.

The new sullen unilateralism of the US in global affairs also finds expression in US political economic strategy in the first years of the twenty first century, but is not guided by any economic isolationism – far from it. Parallel with the war in Afghanistan and the violent occupation of Iraq, but rarely discussed in the same breath, the US government pursued global free trade policies as aggressive if not more so than the preceding Clinton administration. The Clinton administration had mobilized the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to liberalize – deregulate and re-regulate – the financial sectors of economies across the world, eventually contributing to the so-called Asian economic crisis of 1997-1999. (The crisis was not restricted to Asia, of course, but produced economic tidal waves in Russia and Brazil and no economy was

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spared its ripples.) After 2000, the Bush administration, impatient with the calculated incrementalism of the Clinton globalists, sought more direct means of global economic dominance. They focused on dismantling import tariffs in other economies and challenging export subsidies on goods and services coming to the US. They used the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the platform for this restructuring of the global economy, as well as regional agreements such as the Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTAA) which would encompass 34 out of 35 western hemisphere economies (in a fit of protracted cold war revanchism, the US explicitly excluded Cuba). Couched in the language of freedom, equality and rights, these measures and agreements were actually proposed on terms heavily favorable to US economic interests. They were aimed, bluntly, at opening up the world economy for exploitation while maintaining the privileged position of the world's largest economy. By focusing on imports and exports, for example, the US government left subsidies to domestic producers – as opposed to exporters and importers – largely intact. This of course is the favored mechanism of US, European and Japanese trade subsidies, and nowhere is this more so than in the agricultural sector where the US subsidizes farmers to the tune of more than \$300 billion annually. Military, textile, electronics and high tech industries are similarly subsidized.

The cynicism and hypocrisy of this approach was evident for all to see. But US ruling interests still blithely forced it onto the agenda, using its arsenal of diplomatic and economic blackmail tools to move it forward. And in the immediate wake of post-9/11 sympathy, few wanted to challenge the US directly. When the world eventually balked and favorable agreements were not forthcoming, however, the US government responded with outright trade tariffs – 30% against imported steel, much of it from Brazil, and even higher tariffs against selected European Union agricultural products – while continuing to hector the world about the sanctity of free trade. China ground trade talks to a stalemate while Europe reciprocated with tariffs against US goods while maintaining the same free trade rhetoric. Emboldened and threatened by anti-globalization and global social justice movements at home, the leaders of 22 countries, including Brazil, South Africa and India, trounced US-authored agricultural proposals at the 2003 Cancun summit. As the world pushed back, the WTO again and again rebuffed the US which increasingly retreated to regional and bilateral agreements. Even in its own backyard, US plans for the FTAA were scuttled as the other nations of the hemisphere, meeting in Miami then Monterrey, refused to ratify the slanted proposals. An isolated United States was left, by early 2004, to plead rather pathetically for a revival of global trade talks, much as it had had to return to the United Nations, tail between legs, to plead for financial, personnel and institutional support in the occupation and reconstruction of war-torn Iraq. Once again, this time in economic terms, a supposedly universal Americanism – “we are the world” – ran headlong into a narrow American nationalism, constituted as much from the outside as from the inside.

A liberal reading might frame this contemporary history as simply a contest between dual poles of nationalism and globalism. But that would miss the point. In the economic sphere as in the political, the crucial argument is that global ambition is constitutively nationalist, and by corollary, American nationalism is founded on globalist claims. That many other non-US influences also sculpt the politics, economics and cultures of globalization – from Japanese business practices to Bollywood movies to the political power of the European Union – is indisputable. Globalization may be American led but it is manifestly not the same thing as

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Americanization. It is important to make this caveat up front, and we shall follow up these issues below, yet insofar as American nationalism infuses the arteries of a globalizing capitalism like no other, it is also crucial to follow further the contradiction of an American nationalism coiled within contemporary globalism. The Stars and Stripes draped briefly on Saddam's head in fact tells a longer historical and broader geographical story of global ambition.

New American Century, New Imperialism?

More than any other institution, the "Project for a New American Century" (PNAC) embodies this contradiction of class power claiming global sway yet national particularity. Established in 1996, PNAC later became a generative think tank for the younger Bush's administration. It was the brainchild of more than two dozen doctrinaire conservatives who felt that Bill Clinton's neo-liberalism was too soft for US global ambition. Almost flippant in their periodic issuance of statements, missives and op ed pieces in the late 1990s, PNAC was forceful in its effort to move the national foreign policy agenda toward a more pugnacious conservatism. As such, PNAC saw itself as in many ways an ideological counterpoint to established think tanks such as the Council on Foreign Relations. The latter was and is scrupulously internationalist and politically liberal in the sense that it includes an eclectic range of political opinions, from left to right, within a broader rubric of US self-interest in the world. PNAC, by contrast, is far narrower, promoting a strident nationalist globalism spawned of the 1990s neo-conservative movement. As such, by a strange historical twist of political vocabulary, this also makes PNAC true heirs to 18th century Enlightenment liberalism. That twist of political vocabulary may seem jarring against the accepted tapestry of twentieth century American assumptions, according to which liberalism and conservatism occupy opposite political poles, but a longer view questions and contextualizes that conventional wisdom. Unraveling these arguments will be a central theme of chapter 2.

According to their "Statement of Principles," PNAC seeks to "shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests." Much like British rationalizations a century earlier, their quest for "American global leadership" oozes with the haughty obligations of empire, albeit with a different geographical focus:

we cannot safely avoid the responsibilities of global leadership or the costs that are associated with its exercise. America has a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. If we shirk our responsibilities, we invite challenges to our fundamental interests. The history of the 20th century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before they emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire. The history of this century should have taught us to embrace the cause of American leadership.

Their major inspiration is "a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity" in which the United States can "build on the successes of this past century and ... ensure our security and our greatness in the next."^{iv}

A lot can be unpacked from this PNAC manifesto. In the first place, geographically, PNAC's global vision seems to bypass sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. The first is neglected, presumably, because in the world market it is effectively redlined, ghettoized in the

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neocon worldview as a basket case beyond redemption. Latin America, by contrast, is omitted for the opposite reason: it is simply assumed, even after the Monroe Doctrine has long ceased to have any teeth in polite society, that the rest of the Americas constitute a reliable if occasionally petulant backyard to US interests. That leaves Europe, Asia and the Middle East, and it is there that American power will make history. In the second place, historically, PNAC clearly revives publisher Henry Luce's 1941 clarion call that the United States take global power simply because it can. The future was "befogged" because despite its power, the US was reluctant to use it. We should "accept wholeheartedly our duty and our opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world," Luce said, "and in consequence to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit."^v If the cold war frustrated that cherished desire, PNAC, seeing the cold war won, yearns to resuscitate it.

Third, returning to the contradiction at the core of contemporary US imperialism, the global ambition of the framers of the PNAC strategy is extraordinarily intertwined with a nationalist vision: the geographical slippage of national to global and back again is greased with a language of national responsibility *for the global*. By "shirking responsibilities," weak leaders not only invite attacks on the US but contribute to global mayhem and destabilization. If the British Empire accrued colonies in a fit of absent-mindedness, as one famous apology for imperialism put it, PNAC's America must also, for the world's good, become a reluctant imperialist. Global duty and obligation trump selfish reluctance.

PNAC's imprimatur shaped the Bush administration strategy from the start but thoroughly dominated after September 11th 2001. Many of their personnel were Reagan holdovers whose only critique of that era was that its conservatism remained stuck in the bubble gum of liberal sentiment. Among the PNACers who came to populate the younger Bush's administration, were Vice President Dick Cheney (a Bush Sr. insider and previous Halliburton CEO), Donald Rumsfeld (Secretary of Defense), and Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Secretary of Defense). Jeb Bush (Florida Governor, presidential brother and co-engineer of George W. Bush's 2000 electoral victory) was also a signatory. Even more striking than the morphing of PNAC into the Bush administration, is their insistence as early as 1997 on a pre-emptive strike against Iraq. It is "important to shape circumstances before they emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire," they observed.

PNAC and the neocon "revolution" it symbolizes are often seen as the cutting edge of a new American imperialism. While many in their ranks embrace empire without apology, the pejorative implications of "imperialism" may be less welcome. But power for neocons is naked and transparent and their global calculation tilts toward the geopolitical, and this only fortifies the sense of a new imperialism. To parse the difference between empire and imperialism is in any case to split hairs. Like the old imperialism, the new vision depends on a specific prescription for historical continuity and discontinuity. The fruition of US power represents the continuity in this vision: the new American century will be like the old except better, complete, a pure crystallization of legitimate power. The mistakes of the past will be corrected, American power – knocking on the door for the past century – will be unselfconsciously deployed, the role of the US as world policeman will be accepted with honor and pride rather than embarrassed half-heartedness. The discontinuity of the vision is already implicit in this continuity: the delusions of the past, neo-liberal incrementalism and global compromise, a certain penchant for

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reconciling global conflicts diplomatically rather than militarily, all are eschewed in this unbridled ambition for a forceful American globalism. Might, again, makes right. The rise of the influential neocons created a pervasive sense of discontinuity between the Bush government and the preceding Clinton administration: neo-conservatism has taken over from neo-liberalism as a foundational global strategy. Clinton's liberal internationalism is replaced by a much flintier nationalism. A willingness to work through international agreements, treaties, institutions and protocols – the UN, Kyoto environmental accord, International Criminal Court, Durban race summit – is replaced by an authoritarian unilateralism. There is no denying that these kinds of shifts mark the first years of the twenty-first century, but it is not immediately obvious how significant a historical discontinuity they will come to represent.

An old socialist saw has it that bourgeois democracy is a system whereby every four years the working class gets to vote for someone out of the ruling class. Nevertheless, the respective class bases of Bill Clinton's and George Bush's power were somewhat different. The right wing hatred of Clinton had everything to do with the fact that this Arkansas social climber was not to the ruling class born, and that having climbed the class ladder he provided a new model of Democratic rather than Republican populism. Yet the old socialist saw is not wrong. The Clinton administration's power was thoroughly rooted in fairly blue blood – financial capital and Wall Street – and as such it gave pure expression to a globalism innate to that sector of capital. In its geographical philandering, finance capital takes the global as its rightful stage of conquest. Accordingly the Clinton Treasury Department under Robert Rubin enjoyed unprecedented influence and arguably represented the most powerful cabinet seat. A certain homology pertained, in other words, between the class basis of Clinton's power and a global neo-liberalism that sought to establish, deregulate and open up financial as well as commodity markets.

By contrast, the social basis of Bush-Cheney power lay in a somewhat different faction of the ruling class. The list of companies benefitting from the multi-billion dollar publicly funded rebuilding of Iraq – including but not restricted to Dick Cheney's Haliburton as well as Bechtel – or the secret list of companies meeting with Cheney to design tax-funded corporate welfare for energy capitalists suggests the class shift that occurred with the accession of that administration. The latter's social power pivots on the nexus between energy and the military and is rooted not in financial capital as such but in corporate capital devoted to the production of oil, energy equipment, armaments, aeronautics, military hardware and so forth. Its first Treasury Secretary, Paul O'Neill, came not from the financial sector but from Alcoa, a mining, manufacturing and energy corporation, but the Treasury Department under Bush was marginalized and even O'Neill was treated with disdain and soon forced to resign.^{vi}

There are of course many interlinkages between the financial and productive wings of the capitalist class, between Wall Street and Houston or Los Angeles. Without industry producing commodities for profit, Wall Street would have nothing to invest, while producers in turn need Wall Street to float their stocks, issue credit, bankroll corporate takeovers, and so forth. Densely interlocking directorates weave these sectors together, and globalization, widely if not accurately conceived as emanating from the financial sector, is just as much about the international reorganization and expansion of commodity production. For all their connections, however, the pursuit of industrial profit involves different kinds of calculation from the pursuit of interest on

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capital lent. And so it is not surprising that administrations whose power is rooted in different factions of the capitalist class wield global power and express their global ambitions somewhat differently. The significance of this distinction becomes clear in the larger historical and economic context.

As theorists from Marx to Schumpeter, Kondratieff to Kuznets have argued, capitalist expansion is highly cyclical. For Johns Hopkins sociologist Giovanni Arrighi, these “systemic cycles” exhibit a clear geo-historical pattern. Cycles of economic expansion built on the production of commodities – material and immaterial – gradually morph into economies where the greatest concentration of paper profit comes from the financial rather than industrial sector. The reasons for this are complex but not especially mysterious. Long cycles of investment in the productive sectors heighten competition and produce low cost competitors, leading eventually to lower profit rates. Yet to the extent they are successful in the global market, national economies garner larger and larger quantities of capital in search of investment possibilities, and the tendency is to make more and more of the return by financial rather than productive means – by lending to others rather than directly investing oneself. Interest on lent capital increasingly replaces industrial profit. Arrighi observes this movement in prior historical moments, most recently at the end of the nineteenth century when the economies of Britain, France, the United States all experienced an extraordinary shift of power away from industrial toward finance capital.^{vii} The era of the robber barons was supplanted by the power of the House of Morgan, the Rothschilds and the Bank of England.

Yet this centralization of power in financial capital was momentary, receding with war and extinguished in depression, not to gain such heights again till the end of the twentieth century. Moreover, and more ominously in the present context, the rise of financial power was accompanied by a geographical shift in underlying economic power. While Britain consolidated financial power after the 1890s, becoming the world’s bank – a rentier state – its financial hegemony actually marked the zenith of its imperialism; competitors, especially the US and Germany, supplanted its economic power. Decline was not instantaneous but the sun began to set on the British Empire. As one theorist of imperialism put it at the time, a “rentier state is a state of parasitic, decaying capitalism.”^{viii}

The quite different policies of the Clinton and Bush administrations should be considered against a parallel history of the fortunes of productive vis-à-vis finance capital in the US since the 1970s, and the question whether the ascent of Bush and the neocons represents a new imperialism should be treated accordingly. Where the Clinton administration was centrally concerned about geo-economic power – the power to control the myriad institutions and activities that orchestrate the global market – the language of power since 9/11 has been all about geography. Oil is clearly a central calculation in the decision to invade Iraq and topple the Saddam Hussein regime, but as many have remarked, its relevance goes well beyond Iraq or simply the control of supplies for the US market. With the second highest declared reserves in the world, Iraq becomes a pawn in US competition with Europe and Japan and increasingly China. By the same token, the militarization of post-Soviet south-west Asia – Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakstan – is part of a struggle to control the supply of large oil reserves from this region. The new US pugilism, inspired by a political subclass with their social base in the energy/military sector of the capitalist class, can be seen as a strategy for enhanced US control of

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global oil supply over the next two or three decades vis-à-vis competitors.^{ix} To the extent that such a strategy succeeded the US would enjoy unparalleled global economic hegemony.

In his classic analysis, Lenin located the origins of imperialism in the competitive logic of capitalism and the monopoly power, especially rooted in finance capital, that this created. This was a brutal and despicable process for Lenin but not without a silver lining insofar as the centralization of capital might pave the way for a broader socialization of power. It is now clear that imperialism was not “the highest stage of capitalism,” and contemporary imperialism sports some different features from earlier forms. Where Lenin posited a close relationship between monopoly capital, especially finance capital, and the nation state, that connection is significantly weakened today under the aegis of transnational capital. Lenin was surely correct to reject the territorial fetish of his contemporary, the “renegade” Karl Kautsky, and yet Kautsky, raising the possibility of some kind of “superimperialism,” looks prescient today. Where Lenin thought that inter-imperialist rivalries led inevitably to war, as indeed they did in 1914, Kautsky thought a coalition of imperialist states might fashion a relatively stable global rule among themselves in pursuit of global economic plunder. That has not happened, but present-day US unilateralism does raise the possibility that Kautsky may have been half right, anticipating the prospect of a US “superimperialism.” Where Lenin did turn out to be extraordinarily prescient, is in his distinction between imperialism and colonialism. Imperialism, for Lenin, was not simply a land grab of the colonial sort but a logical result of capitalist competition working through a system of national states, hence his focus on finance capital; colonialism was at best a means of imperialism, but there were others. Where many on the left have not yet embraced this insight, and still treat colonialism and imperialism as the same phenomenon, the neocons who have embraced empire are in this respect at least the truer Leninists.

This latter point, especially, suggests considerable historical continuity rather than discontinuity with the past, and it should suggest that today’s imperialism may not be so new. Whatever the tactical discrepancies between the Clinton and Bush administrations, neo-liberals and neo-conservatives, they share entirely the larger goal of an American globalism, and this was never clearer than in the inability of presidential candidate John Kerry to distinguish himself from George W. Imperialism today takes some new forms compared with the colonial era, but its economic and political integument is fairly continuous over the last century. Viewing empire through geographical lenses helps to crystallize that continuity: although the location of imperial power may have switched from London to New York and Washington, and although a territorially defined colonialism may have given way to an imperialism of markets and missiles, and although the national definition of capitals may have given way to a new globalism, the reality of exploitation and domination of the poorest parts of the world by the richest and most powerful has not changed at all. In that sense the wars of the first years of the twenty-first century are all about a resurgent imperialism. For all that war in Iraq has a lot to do with oil, therefore, it is not simply a war for oil but a larger war to control the global economic infrastructure, practices and relations that orchestrate the global economy (of which oil is a significant part). In short, it is about the endgame of globalization.

The draping of the US flag over the doomed statue of Saddam Hussein in 2003 expressed precisely the ambitions of this resurgent imperialism as well as its contradictions.

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Simultaneously a symbol of nationalist power and – insofar as it stood for the victory of a supposed international coalition – a sign of global ambition, the humiliating flagging of Saddam exposed the geographical slippage between national and global scale claims. This contradiction lies at the heart of American imperialism and although it has become a hallmark of America's global profile during the so-called American century, its roots lie in an earlier formative period of US power in the world.

It is a central argument of this book that American imperial ambition is not new either with the neocons or the post-cold war world but that it has been episodic throughout US history. The first truly *global* (as opposed to international) assertion of US power came in the years following 1898 and leading up to World War I. A second episode came with the culmination of World War II. In this context, the Clinton and Bush administrations represent two sides of a single historical moment, namely the zenith of a third moment of US global ambition. In victory and defeat, both were committed to a successful endgame of globalization.

Endnotes

- i. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*. New York: Grove Press, 1958, 82.
- ii. For a succinct summary of this history see Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. The quote is from p. 49.
- iii. Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East 1914-1971*. Baltimore: JHU Press, 1981, 17.
- iv. www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm
- v. Henry Luce, "The American Century," 17 February 1941, 20-23.
- vi. Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O'Neill*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.
- vii. Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*. London: Verso, 1994.
- viii. V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest stage of Capitalism*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1975 edn., 122.
- ix. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.