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Imperial Hopefuls **by Sheldon Richman**

As the parade of presidential wannabes grows longer, the people paying attention this early are probably asking themselves, “Can I picture so and so as president?” This is a bad question on many levels.

Politics, and presidential politics most especially, is little more than theater. The candidate who can create the right mood and evoke the right feelings in voters has a shot at winning. But a man’s or woman’s prowess in creating an atmosphere on the campaign trail (who really creates it, the candidate or the consultants?) says nothing about that person’s capacity to think seriously, to understand history and moral philosophy, or to run a large organization. A talented campaigner can appear to have these capacities, but successful campaigning is about creating appearances. It does not communicate information.

Just watch the television coverage. The focus is on the horserace aspect process. Anything resembling an idea is just a way to distinguish one horse from another. Themes are little more than gimmicks. One candidate claims to be the straight talker. Another’s heart bleeds about the two Americas. A third is the outsider and capable leader who has done more than talk during his career. Yet another exudes hope while saying as little. And one more claims to care what you think. (Do you believe that Hillary Clinton really wants to have a conversation with you?)

All the while, they utter promises no one in his right mind believes, such as making medical care affordable, ending poverty, creating social justice, or defeating terrorism.

This is all role playing, and it’s designed to achieve one thing: power. Over you.

It’s been true for a long time. How could campaigning be anything else but show biz? But it’s even more so today — because none of the “hopefuls” is actually running for president. The job they seek isn’t merely the head of the executive branch of the U.S. government. Given the realities of the world, they are running for emperor. No one is qualified for that job.

The U.S. government has been building an empire for decades. Different administrations have had different styles, but the underlying theme has been the same: America, because it is exceptionally enlightened and has been anointed by history, must lead the world. To do so it

must maintain a worldwide network of political and economic interests, client states, and allies. Those interests must be continuously protected and nurtured, preferably through local leaders, but if necessary by direct intervention. If intervention is required, covert action is usually preferred to open military operations. But if all else fails, the military is available. “Shock and awe,” even with nuclear weapons, is always an option. (This doesn’t necessarily mean victory, however.)

Presidents have claimed the authority to protect “American interests” abroad with or without Congress’s approval. In the last 65 years the United States has had wars but no congressional declarations of war.

You, the taxpayer, foot the ever larger bill and give up loved ones to the slaughter, but you are assured this is all for your safety. That’s the biggest scam of all.

Empire doesn’t mean only foreign affairs. It also has a domestic counterpart: the constant encroachment of the national government on our private lives. When these people talk about using government power in behalf of education, health, prosperity, and the like, you are listening to imperialists who want to maintain the government’s conquest of you.

So as you watch the presidential campaign unfold, remember what these people are really running for. You’ll see the candidates in a whole new light.

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