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An American Empire! If You Want It instead of Freedom, Part 1 **by Richard M. Ebeling**

Fifty years ago, the classical liberal author and journalist Garet Garrett published a collection of essays called *The People's Pottage* (1953). In the midst of the Korean War, he tried to persuade the American people that the United States was on a new course that conflicted with the original conception of the nation. Its constitutional safeguards for the preservation of freedom were being threatened and undermined by the role the government was assuming around the world.

The specific danger was reflected in the title of one of the essays in the volume, "The Rise of Empire." Garrett summarized what he considered the requisite signs of the emerging American Empire. *First, the executive power of the government becomes increasingly dominant.* The traditional institutional restraints and balances on the three branches of government are weakened, with more and more discretionary power and authority shifting to the office of the president. Congress plays an increasingly subservient role, with lawmaking and regulatory decision-making transferred to bureaus and departments under the executive's control.

Second, domestic-policy issues become increasingly subordinate to foreign-policy matters. Out of the ashes of the Second World War, Garrett argued, the United States had taken on the status and position of a global policeman responsible for the "the peace of the world." To fulfill this task, all other matters become of secondary importance. Threats and military actions around the globe place the American people more and more in harm's way. And in the middle of the inevitable crises that come with global military commitments, "sacrifices" of freedom at home are required to ensure "national survival" in the face of unending dangers on every continent where U.S. forces stand at the ready.

Third, Empire threatens to result in the ascendancy of the military mind over the civilian mind. Civil society places the dignity and privacy of the individual at the center of social affairs. Commerce and trade are the peaceful and voluntary means and methods by which people interact

for mutual improvement of their lives. The military mind, on the other hand, imposes hierarchy and control over all those under the direction of the commander in chief. The successful pursuit of the "mission" always takes precedence over the individual and his life. And Empire, by necessity, places increasing importance on military prowess and presence at the expense of civilian life and its network of noncoercive, market relationships.

Fourth, Empire creates a system of satellite nations. As Garrett explained it, "From the point of view of Empire the one fact common to all satellites is that their security is deemed vital to the security of the Empire.... The Empire, in its superior strength, assumes responsibility for the security and the well being of the satellite nation, and the satellite nation undertakes to stand with its back to the Empire and face the common enemy."

Fifth, Empire brings with it both arrogance and fear among the imperial people. As the citizens of the nation that takes on the role of "master of the world," the people increasingly consider themselves all-powerful and superior to those over whom their government has assumed guardianship. More and more on the tongue of the citizens and their political spokesmen are references to "our" superior values, as well as "our" power and importance in all things in the world. Yet at the same time, Empire brings fear. Enemies and threats are now all around the people of the Empire, creating fears of attack and destruction from any corner of the world. Even the "friends" among other nations create suspicion and doubt about their loyalty and dependability in moments of crisis.

And, finally, Empire creates the illusion that a nation is a prisoner of history. The language of Empire contains such phrases and ideas as "it is our time to maintain the peace of the world," or "it is our responsibility to save civilization and serve mankind." There emerges a sense and an attitude of inevitability, that "if not us, then who?" Empire becomes the burden we, the imperial people, not only must bear but from which we have no escape. "Destiny" has marked us for duty and greatness.

An empire in everything but name

For most of the 50 years since Garrett outlined what he considered the characteristics of the emerging American Empire, most political and foreign policy analysts have denied that America was or was pursuing an empire. America was part of the world and as such could not walk away from the world's problems: after all, the outcomes of those problems affected the American people as well. Military alliances with multitudes of other nations, military bases around the globe, tens of billions of dollars spent on foreign and military aid to numerous governments on every

continent, and two protracted and bloody wars on the Asian mainland, were not signs of empire. They were merely the burden created by an unbalanced world in the wake of the destruction of the Second World War.

With the end of the Cold War, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was believed and hoped that the era of America's military presence around the world could be, if not eliminated, at least significantly reduced. Instead, new burdens were now seen to require continuing U.S. political and military "leadership." The end of communism released national and ethnic conflicts in parts of Eastern Europe that 50 years of socialist dictatorships had only repressed. At the same time, "rogue states" and religious fanatics in those areas labeled "the third world" during the Cold War era seemed to threaten continuing political instability and mad acts of large-scale terrorism - especially after the events of September 11, 2001.

How shall America respond and what shall be its continuing role on the world stage? After decades of denial that what American political and military power had created around the globe was, indeed, a form of empire, the word has now had a positive rebirth. The January 13, 2003, cover story of *U.S. News & World Report* was "The New American Empire?" The author summarized the policy tendencies that suggest that the United States is on the path of empire and is likely to continue down it.

Unilateralism in a unipolar world

An essential element in following this path is the concept of "unilateralism," the idea that America must and should act alone politically and militarily around the world whenever necessary, guided by its own notion of its duty to mankind. This theme has been articulated by the Pulitzer Prize winner and syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer, most recently in his article "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," in *The National Interest* (Winter 2002/03). He argues that since the end of the Soviet Union, America has held a unique place on the world stage. It is a vast colossus that produces almost one-third of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and spends more on military preparedness than the next 20 nations together. Its culture and language dominate world commerce, entertainment, science and technology, and lifestyles. No other nation comes anywhere near it -nor should any other nation be allowed to, in Krauthammer's view. It is now a "unipolar world" with only America the one great power. And America must dominate the world if order, stability, freedom, democracy, and justice are to be preserved and extended for mankind.

Krauthammer calls for political and military "unilateralism" on the part of the United States precisely so it will be hamstrung by neither alliance partners nor any of the international organizations of which it is a member. He says that America is not an imperial power desiring to rule other countries for natural resources, nor does it want to impose "a grand vision of a new world," and it has "no great desire to remake human nature." So what is it dominating the world for? Besides its own self-defense, American unilateralism has two goals: "extending the peace by advancing democracy and preserving the peace by acting as balancer of last resort.... America's unique global power allows it to be the balancer in every region." In the pursuit of these things, "America must be guided by its own independent judgment, both about its own interest and about the global interest." There must be no "handcuffing of American power."

He revels in the idea of this unipolar world over which he considers the United States the ruler. And he wants nothing to threaten its preservation. "The new unilateralism argues explicitly and unashamedly for maintaining unipolarity, for sustaining America's unrivaled dominance for the foreseeable future." And at the end of his article, paraphrasing Benjamin Franklin, he says to his readers, "History has given you an empire, if you will keep it."

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