

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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Si Frumkin

SOME EMPIRE WE ARE...

In the 1960s, bored with my textile business, I decided to earn a Master's degree in history. This was before computers, Internet, Google, fax and cell phones, - I had to spend countless hours in libraries looking at old documents and writing on a manual typewriter. My assignment was a paper on the reaction by the print media - the only kind they had in the 1840s - to the Mexican-American War.

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I haven't thought much about the Mexican-American War (1845-1848) since then. In this I am probably in step with an overwhelming majority of my fellow Californians, as well as of the New Mexicans, and Texans who are Americans today because of the results of that 3-year conflict.

I was reminded of it a few weeks ago when we went to a performance by Evan Sayet, a very funny stand-up comedian. He did a monologue ridiculing the way our media, college professors and the European intellectual elite and their admirers go on and on about American imperialism and America's goal to create and enlarge the American empire.

"Look", he said, "if America was really imperialist it wouldn't go to weird places like Iraq or Somalia to have colonies there. It would grab the neighbors - Canada, Mexico - right? It wouldn't really be too hard. A few armored divisions, a little bombing and voila! The Stars and Stripes flying over both of them and we are investing billions in fixing the war damage. Why bother with the far away places in Africa or Asia?"

"No, we never knew how to build empires. We still don't. California was a fluke, an aberration. We took it without really knowing what we were doing. We could have left it alone and today it would be a part of Mexico and they would be digging immigrant smuggling tunnels into Utah."

Funny? I thought so. But true. And then I

thought about the research I had done on the war that made California American. I pulled out the badly typed, 47-year old term paper to take another look at it. And the comedian was right. Even 150 years ago we were not imperialist.

In case you are a little vague about that war - most people are - Texas started it. The Texans wanted to be independent of Mexico and when the Mexicans objected they rebelled. In March 1845, Texas petitioned and was officially annexed by the United States, a step that generated a lively debate among those who approved annexation of Texas and even California, and their opponents. There were a few local skirmishes, letters and declarations were exchanged, speeches were made in Congress, and eventually, in May 1846, war was declared.



After several victorious battles, a few defeats, and finally the occupation of Mexico City by U.S. troops, America won.

The end of the war created a sharp public debate. Some wanted to annihilate Mexico as an independent nation, occupy it and eventually take it into the Union as a state.

"Many Mexicans are in favor of this solution and all Mexicans will benefit by the law and order we can give them" (*New York Globe*, 5/20/1847) and "Let Mexicans and Americans discuss occupation and annexation as a slogan and a goal, let them repeat it as a common theme and we shall soon see the Aztec and American Eagle clasping wings, and our Yankee boys swapping nick-knacks (*sic!*) with the Americanized Mexican Rancheros for Gold" (*Baltimore American*, 10/23/1847).

The opposing - anti-imperialist - point of view was also well represented. The *New Orleans Topic* (9/24/1847) was horrified that

we would annex land simply because we happened to like it:

"A policy of aggression and national plunder would be the only result of this greedy attitude...they who urge annexation, will they then not annex all of South America and the West India Islands including the very barren and insignificant island of Cuba? Seriously, we entreat men to trouble themselves to think, to ask themselves where all this is to end, and see if disunity, bloodshed, anarchy and confusion are not to be what we are to receive in lieu of our great and glorious Union".

On March 10, 1848, the treaty of peace was ratified. California and Texas eventually joined the Union - Mexico remained independent.

The anti-imperialists won the national debate. Imperialism as American policy was rejected then, and again and again, in the centuries to come.

Fifty years later, the "barren and insignificant island of Cuba" and the equally barren islands of the Philippines were freed of Spanish rule and eventually given independence.

One hundred years after the Mexican-American War, U.S. occupied and then left Western Europe, Japan and Korea. American blood was shed on behalf of freedom of foreigners who needed our help. American treasure, knowledge and support made sure that the countries of our allies, and our enemies as well, would be rebuilt and restored. American power was used to protect them from a genuinely imperial superpower - the Soviet Union.

If America is an imperial power then it is a very inefficient one. It has not been able to create and exploit a single colony anywhere, except for Puerto Rico and a few other "insignificant" Pacific Islands that are heavily subsidized by us, have no history of internecine violence or dictatorial rule, and where the inhabitants pay no income tax.

Some empire we are... ●

WE'RE STILL THE WORLD'S CAPED CRUSADER

The United States is the best hope to help steer nations through dangerous times

Robert Kagan, August 5, 2007

The years immediately following the end of the Cold War offered a tantalizing glimpse at a new kind of international order -- one in which nations would grow together or disappear altogether, ideological conflicts would melt away and cultures would intermingle through increasingly free commerce and communications.

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It was the end of international competition, the end of geopolitics, the end of history. The liberal democratic world wanted to believe that the conclusion of the Cold War did not end just one strategic and ideological conflict but *all* strategic and ideological conflict. In the 1990s, under George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, American strategy was aimed at building a post-Cold War order around expanding markets, democracy and institutions -- the triumphant embodiment of the liberal vision of international order.

But it was all something of a mirage. We now know that both nationalism and ideology were already making a comeback in the 1990s. Russia quickly lost its desire to be part of the liberal West. China had embarked on a course of growing ambition and military power. The forces of radical Islam had already begun their jihad, globalization had already caused a backlash around the world and the juggernaut of democracy had already stalled and begun to tip precariously. Yet even today many cling to the vision of "a world transformed."

The world has not been transformed. Nations remain as strong as ever, and so too the nationalist ambitions, the passions and the competition among nations that have shaped history. It's true that the world is still "unipolar," and the United States remains the only superpower. But international competition among great powers has returned, with the United States, Russia, China, Europe, Japan, India, Iran and others vying for regional predominance. Struggles

for power, influence, honor and status in the world have once again become key features of the international scene.

Ideologically, this is a time not of convergence but of divergence. The competition between liberalism and autocracy has re-emerged, with the nations of the world increasingly lining up, as in the past, along ideological lines. Finally, there is the fault line between modernity and tradition, the violent struggle of Islamic fundamentalists



stroying a new, hopeful era. And when Bush leaves, they believe, it can return once again to the way it was. Having glimpsed the mirage once, people naturally want to see it and believe in it again.

WAR DEAD BURIED ABROAD

More than 100,000 American war dead are buried in military cemeteries around the world. The majority of them were killed during World War I and World War II. France, with 11, is the country with the most of these cemeteries.

WORLD WAR I

1. **Aisne-Marne** (France) 42.5 acres, 2,290 buried
2. **Brookwood** (England) 4.5 acres, 468 buried
3. **Flanders Field** (Belgium) 6.2 acres, 368 buried
4. **Meuse-Argonne** (France) 130.5 acres, 14,246 buried
5. **Oise-Aisne** (France) 36.5 acres, 6,012 buried
6. **Somme** (France) 14.3 acres, 1,844 buried
7. **St. Mihiel** (France) 40.5 acres, 4,153 buried
8. **Suresnes** (France) 7.5 acres, 1,565 buried

WORLD WAR II

9. **Ardennes** (Belgium) 90.5 acres, 5,328 buried
10. **Brittany** (France) 7.5 acres, 4,410 buried
11. **Cambridge** (England) 30.5 acres, 3,812 buried
12. **Epinal** (France) 48.6 acres, 5,255 buried
13. **Florence** (Italy) 70 acres, 4,402 buried
14. **Henri-Chapelle** (Belgium) 57 acres, 7,992 buried
15. **Lorraine** (France) 113.5 acres, 10,489 buried
16. **Luxembourg** (Luxembourg) 48.7 acres, 5,076 buried
17. **Manila** (The Philippines) 152 acres, 17,206 buried
18. **Netherlands** (The Netherlands) 65.5 acres, 8,301 buried
19. **Normandy** (France) 172.5 acres, 9,387 buried
20. **North Africa** (Tunisia) 27 acres, 2,841 buried
21. **Rhone** (France) 12.5 acres, 861 buried
22. **Sicily-Rome** (Italy) 77 acres, 7,861 buried



OTHER

23. **Corozal*** (Panama) 16 acres, 5,301 buried
24. **Mexico City**** (Mexico) 1 acre, 750 buried

Note: All figures exclude number of missing.

*Military personnel and others who died during the construction and operation of the Panama Canal.
**Died in the War of 1847.

Source: American Battle Monuments Commission

The first illusion, however, is that Bush really changed anything. Historians will long debate the decision to go to war in Iraq, but what they are least likely to conclude is that the intervention was wildly out of character for the United States. Since the end of World War II at least, American presidents of both parties have pursued a fairly consistent approach to the world. They have regarded the U.S. as the "locomotive at the head of mankind," to use Dean Acheson's phrase. They have amassed power and influence and deployed them in ever-widening arcs around the globe on behalf of interests, ideals and ambitions both tangible and intangible.

Since 1945, Americans have insisted on acquiring and maintaining military supremacy -- a "preponderance of power" in the world -- rather than a balance of power with other nations. They have operated on the ideological conviction that liberal democracy is the only legitimate form of government and that other forms are not only illegitimate but transitory. They have seen the United States as a catalyst for change in human affairs.

against the modern powers and the secular cultures that, in their view, have penetrated and polluted the Islamic world.

Many still prefer to believe that the world is in turmoil not because it is in turmoil but because President Bush made it so by de-

When people talk about a Bush Doctrine, they generally refer to three sets of principles -- the idea of preemptive or preventive military action; the promotion of democracy and "regime change"; and a diplomacy tending toward "unilateralism," a willingness to act without the sanction of

international bodies such as the United Nations Security Council or the unanimous approval of its allies.

But these qualities of U.S. foreign policy reflect not one man or one party or one circle of thinkers. They spring from the nation's historical experience. They are underpinned, on the one hand, by old beliefs and ambitions and, on the other, by power. As long as Americans elect leaders who believe it is the role of the United States to improve the world, they are unlikely to abjure any of these tools. And as long as American power in all its forms is sufficient to shape the behavior of others, the broad direction of American foreign policy is unlikely to change.

Since the end of the Cold War and the emergence of this unipolar world, there has been much anticipation of the rise of a *multipolar* world in which the U.S. is no longer predominant. Many have argued the theoretical and practical unsustainability, not to mention undesirability, of a world with only one superpower. Mainstream realist theory has assumed that others must inevitably band together to balance against the superpower.

Yet American predominance persists. The enormous and productive American economy remains at the center of the international economic system. American democratic principles are shared by more than 100 nations. The anticipated global balancing has for the most part not occurred. Russia and China certainly share a common and openly expressed goal of checking U.S. hegemony, but there has been no concerted or cooperative effort at balancing. The two powers do not trust one another and

are traditional rivals. The rise of China inspires at least as much nervousness in Russia as it does in the United States. In any case, China and Russia cannot

balance the United States without at least some help from Europe, Japan, India or at least some of the other advanced, democratic nations. And those powerful players are not joining the effort.

Nor has the Iraq war had the effect expected by many. Although there are reasonable sounding theories as to why the U.S. position should be eroding as a result of global opposition to the war and the unpopularity of the current administration, there has been little measurable change in the actual policies of nations, other than

their reluctance to assist the U.S. in Iraq. In 2003, those who claimed the U.S. global position was eroding pointed to the defeat of Jose Maria Aznar's party in Spain, for example, and the election of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Brazil. But if elections are the test, other, more recent, votes have put relatively pro-American leaders in power in Berlin, Paris, Tokyo, Ottawa and elsewhere.

The world's failure to balance against the superpower is the more striking because the United States, notwithstanding its difficult interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, continues to expand its power and military reach. The American defense budget currently comes in at roughly \$500 billion a year, not including supplemental spending totaling more than \$100 billion on Iraq and Afghanistan.

Predominance, of course, is not the same thing as omnipotence. Just because the United States has more power than everyone else does not mean it can impose its will on everyone else. American predominance in the early years after World War II did not prevent the North Korean invasion of the South, a communist victory in China or the consolidation of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe -- all far greater strategic setbacks than anything the United States has yet suffered or is likely to suffer in Iraq and Afghanistan.

By the same token, though, foreign policy failures do not necessarily undermine predominance. Some have suggested that failure in Iraq would mean the end of predominance and unipolarity. But a superpower can lose a war -- in Vietnam or in Iraq -- without ceasing to be a superpower if the fundamental international conditions continue to support its predominance. As long as the U.S. remains strong -- and as long as potential challengers inspire more fear than sympathy among their neighbors -- the structure of the international system should remain as Chinese strategists now describe it: one superpower and many great powers.

This is a good thing, and it should con-

tinue to be a primary goal of American foreign policy to perpetuate this relatively benign international configuration of power. The unipolar order, with the United



States as the predominant power, is unavoidably riddled with flaws and contradictions. It inspires fears and jealousies. The United States is,

like all other nations, not immune to error. Compared to the ideal Kantian international order, in which all the world's powers would be peace-loving equals conducting themselves wisely, prudently and in strict obedience to international law, the unipolar system is both dangerous and unjust.

Compared to any plausible alternative in the real world, however, it is relatively stable and less likely to produce a major war between great powers. It is also comparatively benevolent, from a liberal perspective, and more conducive to the principles of economic and political liberalism that Americans and many others value.

American predominance, therefore, does not stand in the way of progress toward a better world. It stands in the way of regression toward a more dangerous world. The choice is not between an American-dominated order and a world that looks like the European Union. The future international order will be shaped by those who have the power to shape it. Its leaders will not meet in Brussels but in Beijing, Moscow and Washington.

After World War II, another moment in history when hopes for a new kind of international order were rampant, Hans Morgenthau warned idealists against imagining that at some point, "the final curtain would fall and the game of power politics would no longer be played."

The world struggle continued then, and it continues today.

Six decades ago, American leaders believed the United States had the unique ability and the unique responsibility to use its power to prevent a slide back to the circumstances that produced two world wars and innumerable national calamities.

Although much has changed since then, America's responsibility has not. ★

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EXPOSURE: OUT-OF-FOCUS

Charles Krauthammer, August 10,

For a month, the veracity of The New Republic's Scott Thomas Beauchamp, the Army private who has been sending dispatches from the front in Iraq, has been in dispute. His latest "Baghdad Diarist" (July 13) recounted three incidents of American soldiers engaged in acts of unusual callousness. The stories were meant to shock. And they did.

In one, the driver of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle amused himself by running over dogs, crippling and killing them. In another, a fellow soldier wore on his head and under his helmet a part of a child's skull dug from a grave.

The most ghastly tale, however, was about the author himself mocking a woman that he said he saw "nearly every time I went to dinner in the chow hall at my base in Iraq." She was horribly disfigured, half her face melted by a roadside bomb. As she sat nearby, Beauchamp said loudly, "I love chicks that have been intimate -- with IEDs. It really turns me on -- melted skin, missing limbs, plastic noses." As his mess hall buddy doubled over in laughter, Beauchamp continued: "In fact, I was thinking of getting some girls together and doing a photo shoot. Maybe for a calendar? 'IED Babes.'" The woman fled.

After some commentators and soldiers raised questions about the plausibility of these tales, both the Army and The New Republic investigated. The Army issued a statement saying flatly that the stories were false. The New Republic claims that it had corroboration from unnamed soldiers. The Weekly Standard quoted an anonymous military source as saying that Beauchamp himself signed a statement recanting what he had written.

Amid these conflicting claims, one issue is not in dispute. When The New Republic did its initial investigation, it admitted that Beauchamp had erred on one "significant detail." The disfigured woman incident happened not in Iraq, but in Kuwait.

That means it all happened before Beauchamp arrived in Iraq. But the whole point of that story was to demonstrate how the war had turned an otherwise sensitive soul into a monster. Indeed, in the precious, highly self-conscious literary style



of an aspiring writer trying out for a New Yorker gig, Beauchamp follows the terrible tale of his cruelty to the disfigured woman by asking, "Am I a monster?" And answering with satisfaction that the very fact that he could ask this question after (the reader has been led to believe) having been so hardened and brutalized by war, shows that there is a kernel of humanity left in him.

But oh, how much was lost. In the past, you see, he was a sensitive soul with "compassion for those with disabilities." In a particularly treacherous passage, he tells us he once worked in a summer camp with disabled children and in college helped a colleague with cerebral palsy. Then this delicate compassionate youth is transformed into an unfeeling animal by war.

Except that it is now revealed that the mess hall incident happened before he even got to the war. On which point, the whole story -- and the whole morality tale it was meant to suggest -- collapses.

And it makes the rest of the narrative banal and uninteresting. It's the story of a disgusting human being, a mocker of the disfig-

ured, who then goes to Iraq and, as such human beings are wont to do, finds the company of other such human beings who kill dogs for sport, wear the bones of dead children on their heads and find amusement in mocking the disfigured.

We will soon learn if there actually was a dog killer or a bone wearer. But The New Republic seems not to have understood how the Kuwait "detail" undermines everything. After all, what made the purported story interesting enough to publish? Why did The New Republic run it?

Because it fits perfectly into the most virulent narrative of the anti-war left. The Iraq War -- "George Bush's war," as even Hillary Clinton, along with countless others who had actually endorsed the war, now



calls it -- has not only caused the sorrow and destruction that we read about every day. It has, most perniciously, caused invisible damage -- now made visible by the soul-searching of one brave and gifted private: It has perverted and corrupted

the young soldiers who went to Iraq, and now return morally ruined. Young soldiers like Scott Thomas Beauchamp.

We already knew from all of America's armed conflicts -- including Iraq -- what war can make men do. The only thing we learn from Scott Thomas Beauchamp is what literary ambition can make men say. Ω