

Adolf A. Berle candidly admitted at the end of the 1930s that the New Deal had failed to restore the health of the political economy. There were still ten to twelve million unemployed, and the recession of 1937 was the most devastating in the history of the country.

And so to war. But not a war to defend a functioning equitable society — not even a new vision of such a society. And so into the dissembling and the lying; and into the stretching of the letter as well as the spirit of the Constitution — and the related weakening of the principles and practices of representative government. I say these things with great anguish because I thought then and I think now that we should have stood with England against Hitler.

But we should have done it at the end of an open, honest debate. And if the decision had been to wait and see, or go to war only with a clear commitment to basic structural reforms, or to fight Germany but not Japan (or vice versa) — then so be it. What nags my soul on the Oregon beach is not that I was shot at and hit but that my leaders lied to me and never faced the real issue inherent in the imperial way of life.

Instead, as historians John Morton Blum and Stephen E. Ambrose have made apparent, Roosevelt and his associates crab-walked into two wars. They then determined to win them as fast and as thoroughly and as cheaply as possible — all with the least possible disruption of domestic society. We are back with Lincoln and the annihilation of the Confederacy, hoping that the casualties won't be too high. There were three major consequences of that decision and approach:

(1) We would help the Russians do most of the dying. That involved grave dissembling in our negotiations with them about a second front.

(2) We would rely on machines, especially airplanes, rather than men. We were doing that long before Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Someone with a fancy for black humor might conclude that since we failed to invent a precision bomb-sight, or develop the long-range bomber necessary for its use, we settled for the atom bomb. But the real point is that we abandoned precision bombing very early in the game. One of the early fire-storm raids killed 42,000 in Hamburg. Then Dresden, where 2,372 bombers managed to kill fifty people apiece. And then Tokyo, where one night some 83,000 people sizzled, suffocated and fried.

(3) The domestic American political economy was sustained by war rather than by reform. Perhaps the most revealing episode of that part of the story occurred in January 1941, nearly a year before Pearl Harbor but after it was apparent armaments had become the prescription for recovery. The most militant and impressive black leader of the day, A. Philip Randolph of the Pullman Sleeping Car Porters Union, began to organize a massive march on Washington, D.C. to force the New Deal to honor its rhetoric and promises to the poor and the blacks and other minorities.

Roosevelt wanted nothing of that nature to confuse the issues and so, after six months of shilly-shallying, he finessed crisis by issuing an executive order ostensibly ending discrimination in war-related industries, the military and the civilian federal bureaucracy. There were no penalties for failure to comply. But it was enough to abort the demonstration.

Thus were American leaders confirmed in their faith in their imperial outlook. And they thereby misled themselves. They concluded that other radicals and militants would compromise on American terms. But the Russians were not American blacks. Nor were the Chinese, or various others. Those people were deeply patriotic, just as were American blacks. But not to the American imperial way of life.

Given all that, let us do a bit of routine cost accounting on the consequences of winning a war as quickly, thoroughly and cheaply as possible, and with the least possible disruption of American society. The first line is very nice: only 405,399 deaths. Far better than Lincoln. The second line looks even better: the war created 17 million new jobs safe from bombs or bullets. But the bottom line is not so good: the Russians knew they had been lied to: they lost at least 20 million. And they quickly became a rival empire, occupying central Europe with huge communist armies: a half century worldwide Cold War and nuclear arms race between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was the deplorable result.

At that point a disinterested observer from another galaxy might reasonably have expected Americans to face up to the price of their imperial way of life, perhaps even to consider an alternative. Winston Spencer Churchill was hardly impartial but did his best to educate Americans about the elementary facts of imperial life. The fascinating and revealing part of our response to Sir Winston's tutoring is how we accepted his recommendation to stand firm while ignoring his advice — indeed his pleas — to negotiate a clear, explicit and rational imperial settlement with our rival superpower.



PAUL LACHINE (2002)

There are two primary explanations for that response. On the one hand, we simply could not confront the truth that we were an empire and so act responsibly as an empire. On the other hand, we could not imagine any alternative to empire as a way of life. Hence we revived Lincoln's policy of containment, extended Theodore Roosevelt's corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and set out once again to save the world for democracy — get hold of history and make it conform.

Nothing documents that as clearly as National Security Council Document Number 68, approved by President Harry S. Truman in April 1950. Notice first two things about that date: it is two months before the eruption of the Korean War and more than two years after Churchill beseeched us to come to terms with reality of the Iron Curtain, a term he concocted. Furthermore NSC-68 is a reaffirmation and extension of NSC-20/4 of November 1948, which also came after Churchill's efforts to save us from ourselves.

NSC-68 begins with a disturbed review of how all the old empires have collapsed. It summarizes that overview with this revealing conclusion: "Even if there were no Soviet Union we would face the great problem... (that) the absence of order among nations is becoming less and less tolerable." Then, defining the United States as the only nation capable of imposing such order, it makes the Soviet Union the focus of the effort. It candidly admits Churchill's main point: the United States and its allies possess greater power— enough to deter any direct attack.

But, unlike Churchill, American leaders concluded that such power must be further increased and deployed to "foster a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet system"; "foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system," and foment and support "unrest and revolt in selected strategic satellite countries." As for means: "any means, covert or overt, violent or nonviolent." Then pointing to the experience of World War 2, policy makers confidently predicted that the increase in military spending would prevent the possibility of any socially and politically explosive "real decrease in the standard of living."

In a rare moment of candor, Secretary of State Dean Acheson admitted in 1953 that he and Truman might not have been able to sustain their grandiose imperial policy if the North Koreans had not "come along and saved us."

On balance, however, it was simply one of those wars that anybody could have counted on to erupt sometime. Both halves of that divided country were dying to go to war to unite them. That old devil nationalism had been raised to fever pitch by very strong shots of mutually exclusive theology. In any event, the debate about who bears ultimate responsibility obscures the fundamental issue of the response by Truman and Acheson.

Clearly, when the Secretary acknowledged that Korea "saved us," he did not mean in the sense of preventing defeat or destruction of the United States. He meant only that it allowed the government to implement the apocalyptic imperial strategy of NSC-68. Primed and ready, armed (or driven) psychologically as well as with the heady rhetoric of that document, they simply went to war. They bypassed Congress and the public and confronted both with an accomplished fact. A few phone calls, and it was done. Go to bed at peace and wake up at war.

It was even more dramatic than the subsequent intervention in Vietnam as a demonstration of the centralization of power inherent in empire as a way of life. The State had literally been compressed or consolidated into the President and his like-minded appointees. In a marvelously revealing description, underscoring Truman's earlier lecture to the Cabinet, the war without a declaration of war was called a "police action." Ironically, the most succinct commentary applicable to Truman's remark was provided by an early editor of *The New York Times*. "We are the most ambitious people the world has ever seen," noted Henry J. Raymond on May 30, 1864, "— & I greatly fear we shall sacrifice our liberties to our imperial dreams."

The military containment and subsequent rout of the North Korean forces (by the end of September 1950) created a moment of imperial euphoria. American leaders were high on NSC-68. The United States undertook to liberate North Korea by conquest and integrate it into the American empire. It was assumed in Washington that such action would accelerate the process of disintegration within and between Russia and China (which became communist in 1949) and so finally create an open-door world. Then came the moment of truth, and the empire suddenly found itself at bay. The Chinese entered the

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## 'WE'RE AN EMPIRE NOW'

BY JEROME ARNOLD

George W. Bush is a visionary. He apparently had the foresight to anticipate that something like the Downing Street Memo (of July 23, 2002) would leak, exposing his early decision and preparations for the Iraq invasion. There was insufficient legal reason to invade so he exaggerated Iraq's WMDs: according to the memo, "The intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy." Bush also took measures to protect himself because aggressive invasion of another country is a war crime in the International Criminal Court (ICC) code.

His action was simple. He unsigned the documents that committed the U.S. as a member of ICC. Also, he required all nations that received aid from the U.S. to sign a bilateral agreement to not turn over Americans accused of war crimes to the ICC for prosecution.

In November 2002, Bush's appointee Undersecretary of State John Bolton confessed that the primary reason for the opposition to the creation of the ICC was fear that the court might prosecute Bush himself. Aware of how his Party had harassed President Clinton, Bolton said: "That history argues overwhelmingly against international repetition. Simply launching massive criminal investigations has enormous political impact. Although subsequent indictments and convictions are unquestionably more serious, a zealous independent prosecutor can make dramatic news just by calling witnesses and gathering documents, without ever bringing formal charges."

Well before the July 23, 2002 Downing Street meeting, Bush was trying to exempt Americans from ICC rulings.

The June 23, 2001 edition of *The New York Times* reported that "Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said after a

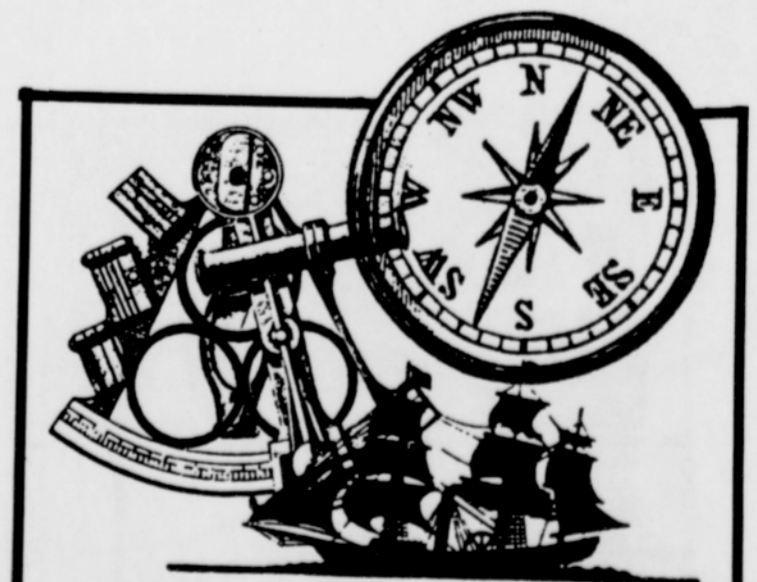
meeting with Kofi Annan (Sec.Gen. of the UN) earlier this year that the Bush administration would never support the (International Criminal) court. UN officials say the administration has quietly asked the United Nations whether it can rescind Washington's signature." The "Washington's signature" referred to President Clinton's signature on the ICC membership document.

In Bush's vision, John Bolton is the ideal person for the job of UN Ambassador. In his work in every Republican administration since 1980, according to Tom Barry, who wrote *Bolton The Armageddon Man*, "...Bolton has become known as the right's most effective and strident opponent of the United Nations and all forms of global governance and international law not controlled by the U.S. government."

In mid 2002 a senior administration advisor said to journalist Ron Suskind, "...guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality'.... 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality — judiciously as you will — we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'"

The rest of the world's nightmare — Bush's vision — is that the United States not be answerable to any higher authority than God: a global empire.

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