

is to speak truth to one's fellow citizens. As the end is restoring democratic process, so the means should be democratic.

The mechanisms inhibiting opposition to state power, especially when backed by electoral majorities, are not something new. Even in the freest countries there is at all times a conventional wisdom, which may wander more or less far from reality. Sometimes it strays into a fantasyland. Then marginal voices (which of course are not correct merely because they are marginal) have a special responsibility to speak up, and sometimes they shift the mainstream — as happened, for instance, in the 1960s regarding the Vietnam War and legal segregation. For the better part of a century, segregation fit squarely within the banks of the American mainstream. Then it didn't.

As the mere mention of Vietnam suggests, the repetition dilemma has causes that go deeper into the past. I embarked on journalism in 1966 as a reporter in Vietnam. The experience led, naturally and seamlessly, to a decade of writing about the war and, finally, when the war "came home," to the constitutional crisis of the Nixon years and its resolution via Nixon's resignation under threat of impeachment. The war and the impeachment were connected at every point. It wasn't just that Nixon's wiretapping was directed against Daniel Ellsberg, war critic and leaker of the Vietnam-era Pentagon papers; or that the "plumbers" outfit that carried out the Watergate break-in was founded to spy on, disrupt and attack war critics; or that Nixon's persistence in trying to win the war even as he withdrew American troops from it drove him into the paranoia that led him to draw up an "enemies list" and sponsor subversions of the electoral process — it was that his entire go-it-alone, imperial conception of the Presidency originated in his pursuit of his war policy in secrecy and without Congressional involvement.

And now, 30+ years later, we find ourselves facing an uncannily similar combination of misconceived war abroad and constitutional crisis at home. Again a global crusade (then it was the Cold War, now it is the "war on terror") has given birth to a disastrous war (then Vietnam, now Iraq); again a President has responded by breaking the law; and again it falls to citizens, journalists, judges, justices and others to trace the connections between the overreaching abroad and the overreaching at home. In consequence, not only are we condemned to repeat ourselves for the duration of the current crisis but a remarkable number of those repetitions are already repetitions of what was said more than three decades ago.

Consider, for instance, the following passage from a speech called "The Price of Empire," by the great dissenter against the Vietnam War, Senator William Fulbright.

Before the Second World War our world role was a potential role; we were important in the world for what we could do with our power, for the leadership we might provide, for the example we might set. Now the choices are almost gone: we are almost the world's self-appointed policeman; we are almost the world defender of the status quo. We are well on our way to becoming a traditional great power — an imperial nation if you will — engaged in the exercise of power for its own sake, exercising it to the limit of our capacity and beyond, filling every vacuum and extending the American "presence" to the farthest reaches of the earth. And, as with the great empires of the past, as the power grows, it is becoming an end in itself, separated except by ritual incantation from its initial motives, governed, it would seem, by its own mystique, power without philosophy or purpose. That describes what we have almost become...

Is there a single word — with the possible exception of "almost" at the end of the paragraph — that fails to apply to the country's situation today? Or consider this passage from Fulbright's *The Arrogance of Power* with the Iraq venture in mind:

Traditional rulers, institutions, and ways of life have crumbled under the fatal impact of American wealth and power but they have not been replaced by new institutions and new ways of life, nor has their breakdown ushered in an era of democracy and development.

Recalling these and other passages from Fulbright and other critics of the Vietnam era, one is again tempted to wonder why we should bother to say once more what has already been said so well so many times before. Perhaps we should just quote rather than repeat — cite, not write.

Of course, people like to point out that Iraq is not Vietnam. They are right insofar as those two countries are concerned. For instance, today's anarchic Iraq, a formerly unified country now on or over the edge of civil war, is wholly different from yesterday's resolute Vietnam, divided into north and south but implacably bent on unity and independence from foreign rule. And of course the two eras could scarcely be more different. Most important, the collapse of the Soviet Union has effectuated a full-scale revolution in the international order. The number of the world's superpowers has been cut back from two to one, China has become an economic powerhouse, market economics have spread across the planet, the industrial age has been pushed aside by the information age, global warming has commenced and rock music has been replaced by rap. Yet in the face of all this, American policies have shown an astonishing sameness, and this is what is disturbing. In our world of racing change, only the pathologies of American power remain constant. Why?

Perhaps a clue can be found in the famous speech that Senator Joseph McCarthy gave in Wheeling, West Virginia, in February 1950. This was the occasion on which he announced his specious list of Communists in the State Department, launching what soon was called McCarthyism. He also shared some thoughts on America's place in the world. The Allied victory in World War 2 had occurred only five years before. No nation approached the United States in wealth, power or global influence. Yet McCarthy's words were a dirge for lost American greatness. He said, "At war's end we were physically the strongest nation on earth and, at least potentially, the most powerful intellectually and morally. Ours could have been the honor of being a beacon in the desert of destruction, a shining proof that civilization was not yet ready to destroy itself. Unfortunately, we have failed miserably." On the contrary, McCarthy strikingly added, "we find ourselves in a position of impotency."

By what actions had the United States thrown away greatness? McCarthy blamed not mighty forces without but traitors within, to whom he assigned an almost magical power to sap the strength of the country. America's putative decline occurred "not because our only powerful potential enemy has sent men to invade our shores, but rather because of the traitorous actions of those who have been treated so well by this nation." And, he raved on in a later speech, "we believe that men high in this Government are concerting to deliver us to disaster. This must be the product of a great conspiracy, a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man. A conspiracy of infamy so black that, when it is finally exposed, its principals shall be forever deserving the maledictions of all honest men."



McCarthy seemed to look at the United States through a kind of double lens. At one moment the nation was a colossus, all-powerful, without peer or rival; at the next moment a midget, cringing in panic, delivered over to its enemies, "impotent." Like the genie in Aladdin's bottle, the United States seemed to be a kind of magical being, first filling the sky, able to grant any wish, but a second later stoppered and helpless in its container. Which it was to be depended not on any enemy, all of whom could easily be laid low if only America so chose, but on Americans at home, who prevented the unleashing of might. If Americans cowered, it supposedly was mainly before other. Get them out of the way, and the United States could rule the globe. The right-wing intellectual James Burnham named the destination to which this kind of thinking led. "The reality," he wrote, "is that the only alternative to communist World Empire is an American Empire, which will be, if not literally world-wide in formal boundaries, capable of exercising decisive world control."

McCarthy's double vision of the United States must have resonated deeply, for it turned out to have remarkable staying power. Consider, for example, the following statement by the super-hawkish columnist Charles Krauthammer, penned 51 years later, in March 2001 (six months before September 11). Again we hear the King Kong-like chest beating, even louder than before. For the end of the Cold War, Krauthammer wrote, had made the United States "the dominant power in the world, more dominant than any since Rome." And so, just as McCarthy claimed in 1950, "America is in a position to reshape norms, alter expectations and create new realities." But again there is a problem. And it is the same one — the enemies within. Thus again comes the cry of frustration, the anxiety that this utopia, to be had for the taking, will melt away like a dream, that the genie will be stuffed back into its bottle. For the "challenge to unipolarity is not from the outside but from the inside. The choice is ours. To impiously paraphrase Benjamin Franklin: History has given you an empire, if you will keep it." The remedy? "Unapologetic and implacable demonstrations of will."

We find expressions of the same double vision — a kind of anxiety-ridden triumphalism — again and again in iconic phrases uttered in the half-century between McCarthy and Krauthammer. Walt Rostow, chair of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, articulated a version in 1964, on the verge of the Johnson administration's escalation of the Vietnam War, when he spoke in a memo to Secretary of State Dean Rusk of "the real margin of influence...which flows from the simple fact that at this stage of history, we are the greatest power in the world — if only we behave like it." Madeleine Albright, then UN ambassador, gave voice to a similar frustration when she turned to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell and asked, "What's the point of having this superb military you are always talking about if we can't use it?" But it was Richard Nixon who gave the double vision its quintessential expression when, in 1970, at the pinnacle of America's involvement in Vietnam, he stated, "If, when the chips are down, the world's most powerful nation, the United States of America, acts like a pitiful, helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world." For Nixon, as for McCarthy and Krauthammer, the principal danger was on the home front. As he said on another occasion, "It is not our power but our will and character that is being tested....The question all Americans must ask and answer is this: Does the richest and strongest nation in the history of the world have the character to meet a direct challenge by a group which rejects every effort to win a just peace?" And, even more explicitly, "Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that."

The question is how the United States could be a "giant" yet pitiful and helpless, the "richest and strongest" yet unable to have its way, in possession of the most superb military force in history yet unable to use it, the "greatest power the world had ever known" yet at the same time paralyzed. Why, if the United

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