



*"American superiority in all matters of science, economics, industry, politics, medicine, engineering, social life, and of course the military was total and indisputable. Even Europeans suffering the pangs of wounded chauvinism looked on with awe at the brilliant example of the United States has set for the world as the third millennium begins." Tom Wolfe, Hooking Up*



American military power is the most dominant force the world has known since ancient Rome argues Commandant Rory Finnegan. He also offers his opinions on the possible direction and posture of US military and foreign policy following the re-election of George W. Bush to a second presidential term in the White House. Images from Reuters Picture Agency, Mediciens sans Frontieres and Imagenet.



*"In the whole world, wherever the vault of heaven turns, there is no Land so well adorned with all that wins nature's crown as Rome (Sic), the ruler and second mother of the world, with her men and women, her generals and soldiers, her slaves, her pre-eminence in arts and crafts, her wealth of brilliant talent..."*  
*Pliny, Natural History*

# THE USA : EAGLE TRIUMPHANT?

**BY COMDT RORY FINEGAN**



US Soldiers on the outskirts of Baghdad during the final days of Saddam Hussein's regime. Image: Medecins sans Frontieres

The election in the USA has given the Republican Party of George Bush a renewed mandate that the rest of the world will watch with great interest to see how American foreign policy will unfold over the coming four years. Seldom has a US presidential election campaign been watched from the opposite side of the Atlantic with so much anticipation as the epic fight between George W. Bush and John Kerry. Seldom too, had Europeans been quite so partisan in their support for one candidate. Kerry had been Europe's overwhelming favorite; in Germany alone 80% of the electorate preferred the Democratic contender to Mr. Bush. For many Europeans it was a choice between the complex nuances of Kerry versus the crude conviction of Bush. It crystallized and delineated the debate about how to keep America safe from international terrorism and rogue states. Kerry's campaign contended that a Democratic administration would enjoy a fresh start, without the "poisoned well," of

transatlantic relations. The theory was that having extended the hand of co-operation, Mr. Kerry could reasonably request (in his

**For the past two decades Republicans have mobilised, with military precision, free-traders, the religious right, small government apostles and neo-conservatives to produce a highly sophisticated political party with a master propagandist in Karl Rove**

flawless French) pan-European assistance, particularly in Iraq. At its core, the 2004 election was about America's place in the world. George Bush promises more

unilateralism; Kerry had pledged to rebuild links with the wider world. Third party candidate Ralph Nader had described both the Republicans and the Democrats as a "two-state dictatorship."

But now George Bush and the Republican Party have four more years to implement their policies, and traditionally a US President in his second term seeks to leave a legacy and his mark on history. In their book "The Right Nation: Why America is Different," John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge accept that for many Europeans in the secular and liberal cities of Europe, the American right is considered fanatical, shallow and dangerously devout. George W. Bush is thought of as a warmongering zealot who is leading his nation to economic and political ruin. Both Micklethwait and Wooldridge see George Bush's presidency as the potential deathblow for the Democrats as the natural party of government. Despite an enormous deficit and a divisive war, a majority of Americans

**In their book "The Right Nation: Why America is Different," John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge accept that for many Europeans in the secular and liberal cities of Europe, the American right is considered fanatical, shallow and dangerously devout.**



The author contends that the world has not seen global dominance, such as the US now exerts, since ancient Rome.

still choose Bush over his rival, and that, the authors assert, is because America is at heart a deeply conservative country. In an insightful analysis that is also entertaining they chart the conservative movement's fortunes from the Eisenhower presidency (1952-1960), to this year's November elections. They argue that American conservatism has become the most successful political machine in the developed world. Today the Republicans hold not only the White House, both Houses of Congress, and a majority of state legislatures and governorships – including the liberal states of California and New York. For the past two decades Republicans have mobilised, with military precision, free-traders, the religious right, small government apostles and neo-conservatives to produce a highly sophisticated political party with a master propagandist in Karl Rove, despised by Democrats as the eminence grise of the Republican throne. Unlike the European elite, American conservatives are not

embarrassed by their fervent devotion to God and Liberty. Bush has succeeded in tapping into the conservative soul of America like no president before him, including Reagan.

For many in Europe the question now is of a continuing world order in an era of American supremacy. September 11th, 2001, transformed the US in ways most non-Americans still do not understand. The attacks ignited humiliation, anger and fear even greater than the attack on Pearl Harbor that brought America into the Second World War. It led the first Bush administration and indeed a large part of the American people to make defeat of terrorism and the destruction of rogue regimes not just the paramount objective of US policy, but also the lens through which foreign relations are perceived. Europeans neither share the anger nor agree on the primacy of the threat. Tony Blair, UK Prime Minister, is the most striking exception. The American pundit Robert Kagan famously declared that

Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus. History has taught that continental Europeans to fear war, while the Anglo-Saxon societies of the US and Britain believe it is frequently necessary. We live in an uncertain era where ironically many of the warm comforts of the Cold War era are no longer with us.

The end of 1991, of what Eric Hobsbawm christened the 'short' 20th Century, had been heralded by optimists as the beginning of a New World Order. A geopolitical glance around the world today would not seem to confirm this. Iraq remains in turmoil; the only difference being each day seems to herald a new atrocity. The genie of proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD's) stubbornly refuses to return to its bottle, with deep concerns continuing to exist in relation to both Iran and North Korea. World oil prices remain at a high, styming the chances of a much-needed kick-start to the world's economy.



French President Jacques Chirac, one of the most vociferous opponents of current American foreign policy.

### Pax Americana

Over all of this, like a colossus strides the United States, unarguably the hegemonic power on the World stage with the military muscle the likes of which has not been seen since the Rome of Augustus. The central fact of geopolitics today is US military power. America accounts for 38% of all military expenditure in the world and crucially a much higher proportion of military capabilities. There is no conventional force in the world that could fight an all out war against America and win. Therefore any question about how the world is organised ipso facto are at least partly questions about US policy. In a perverse sense the United States is the only power with a global strategy – in another sense it is the only power with an

independent strategy at all. The rest of the world reacts to America, fears America, lives under American protection, envies, resents, plots against, and depends on America. Ergo every other country defines its strategy in relation to America. The indisputable vanguard of the West, which nearly all analysts see as having military, scientific, and technical supremacy over the rest of the world. But for much of the World it is this very predominance that remains a cause of concern, not only to enemies of the USA but also traditional allies.

The US emerged from the Second World War with the most powerful economy, the strongest air force and navy and the most lethal weapon, the atomic bomb. For more than half a century its

foreign policy was based on patient containment and nuclear armed deterrence of the Soviet Union. Successive presidents from Harry S. Truman to Ronald Reagan, recognised that US power was exercised most effectively through alliances and multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, NATO and at times, the United Nations. Arguably containment as exercised during this period represented one of the most successful geopolitical foreign policy strategies in living memory. The essence of George Keenan's original concept was that you should defend yourself and wait for political change. The architect of containment famously said in 1949: "a democratic society cannot plan a preventive war...even if it were possible for

PEEN

S

**The Bush Doctrine, as elucidated in the National Security Strategy (NSS), unarguably represents a shift from previous US policy on the use of force**

democracy to lay its course deliberately towards war, I should question whether that would be the right answer. We define our objectives in terms of what can be accomplished by means short of war. And I for one am deeply thankful to that Providence has placed that limitation on us." This was also the era seen by many analysts as a Golden Age in American foreign policy which saw the crafting of National Security Council (NSC - 68) by its architect Paul Nitze; an intricately balanced document, comprehensive in describing the then nature of the geopolitical threat posed to the United States and the Western World on foot of the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and in China in 1949; and the detonation by the Soviets of a nuclear bomb in 1950.

The terrorist attack of 9/11 changed the terms of engagement between the US and the rest of the World. Gone are the doctrines of containment and deterrence. The Bush Doctrine, as elucidated in the National Security Strategy (NSS), unarguably represents a shift from previous US policy on the use of force, particularly the more circumscribed policies of the Clinton administration post-Somalia. Two central pillars underpinning this strategy are pre-emptive action and regime change. The Bush administration also saw a difficult transition in its relationships with 'Old' and 'New' Europe. During this period Bush rejected the Kyoto agreement on Global warming, abandoned an OECD scheme to combat money laundering, resisted a special UN convention to stem the international flow of small arms, refused to sign an enforcement protocol for the Biological Weapons Convention; campaigned actively against the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court; determined to abandon the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and withdrew from the UN conference in Durban on combating racism and xenophobia in protest against criticism of Israel. It seems to clearly signal a determination to steer away from alliances and treaties if they do not serve the US national interest as narrowly conceived in the NSS. This view is symbolised in phrases used by Richard Haass, director of policy planning in the State Department. He defined US policy as an à la carte multilateralism.

### Frontier Law

Absent a "smoking gun" in Iraq, regime change, retrospectively, becomes a form of "strategic pre-emption", and the potential for such a precedent to be used to justify aggression is practically open-ended. Even without the immediate threat of aggression against its neighbours, the potential regional arms races that the Doctrine could spawn, will, arguably in the longer term, make conflict more likely. The Irish historian Joe Lee commented that, "every General Staff in potential great powers must be rubbing their hands in glee at the green light which this gives them to demand more military resources for military purposes". And Martin Wolf of the FT observed, "any country actually viewed as a threat by the US must, by America's own logic, attempt to make itself safe by obtaining weapons of mass destruction." This effect has been most graphically illustrated by North Korea, and Iran and others may well be following the same

path. In turn, volatile North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons could cause a domino effect, which could bring Japan and South Korea into the nuclear club. The US's go-it-alone strategy reached its apogee in the invasion of Iraq. Here was a war fought without the support of traditional allies.

Critics maintain that the Bush doctrine could increase international terrorism in several ways. Firstly, the "war on terrorism," by definition, raises the profile of terrorism and confers warrior, rather than criminal status on adversaries. Secondly, there is inherent in the doctrine the potential to fuel anti-Americanism. The policy is a restatement of the old Roman maxim "that enemies can hate as long as they fear". Thirdly prosecution of the Doctrine's objectives through mainly military means will inevitably lead to 'collateral damage', which will act as a recruiting Sergeant for terrorism. The experiences of the French in Algeria, and countless other examples, show that fighting fire with fire is usually counterproductive. The "Eagle Triumphant" nature of Bushism is perceived by America's enemies as arrogant, militaristic and inconsistent. It is no coincidence that Anthony Lake gave 'rogue' states the alternative name of 'backlash' states.

The US has also found its policies provoking an 'allergic reaction' amongst



Karl Rove, the strategist behind Bush's re-election.



Like the Romans, the author writes, the Americans are vulnerable to military overspending and provoking global resistance to their influence.

allies. Fareed Zakara, in a juxtaposition of a Churchillian quote noted "never have so many of its allies been so opposed to its policies." The essential point is that the way in which the US exercises its power is actually becoming a liability. As Joseph Nye explains in a reprise of his theories of "soft power," that if credibility and legitimacy are what soft power is all about that ergo American power is ultimately diminished by inconsistency and unilateralism.

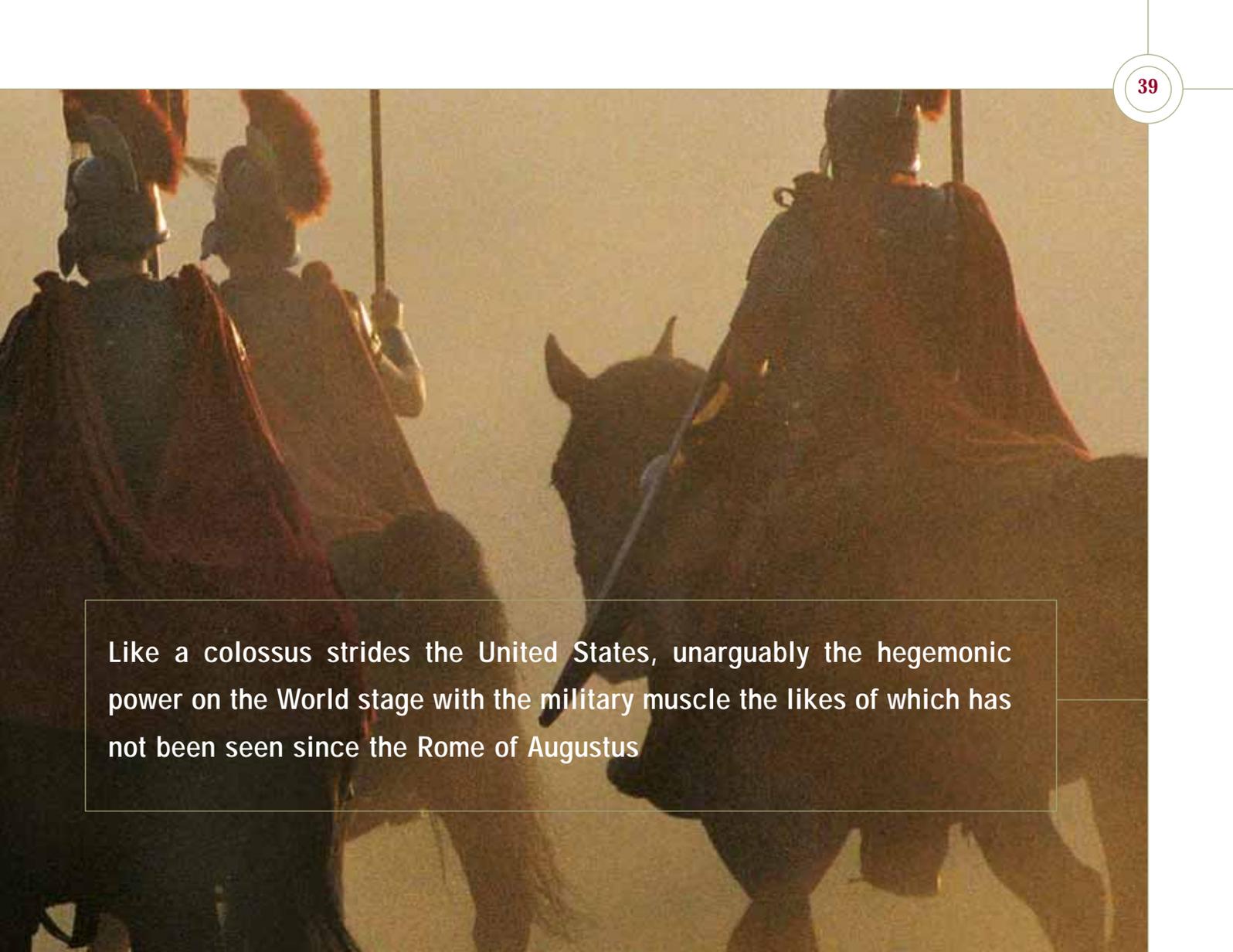
### Emptying the War Chest

There are echoes of ancient Rome at its zenith with today's US. The direct costs of the war on terror could lead to the economic decline of the US. The US now has troops in some 80 countries despite troop reduction in Germany and North Korea. Pax Romana was an empire, its borders guarded by increasingly forgotten

legions. Dana Priest, a journalist on the Washington Post in his work "The Mission; Waging War & Keeping Peace with America's Military," concentrates on the huge expansion of the military sector over the last two decades and the manner in which American diplomacy has suffered a steady decline of funding and influence in favour of the armed forces. For four years he recorded the lives of the CINC's, the handful of powerful commanders-in-chiefs who govern zones of global responsibility like proconsuls in the Roman Empire.

In an age of globalisation, any sort of Pax Americana has to cover the globe. It cannot do that: even America is not strong enough to manage the whole globe on its own. One of the ironies of this is that the historical rationale behind "forward military deployment," was the containment and deterrence of threats, an approach which the NSS insists is no longer valid. The

problem with the latter course is that America's allies do not, for the most part, believe that in cost-benefit analysis terms such overwhelming power projection is either necessary or desirable and thus do not see any reason for contributing to the war chest. This is one of the issues at the heart of the debate as postulated in Robert Kagan's "Paradise & Power" as to whether Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus. Until such time as the relative merits of "soft security" versus 'hard' military spending are resolved, misunderstanding between Washington and its traditional allies seem inevitable. At the same time the Herculean task of creating an ever expanding Department of Homeland Security seems to multiply the military and economic burdens for America in the future. America's own rise to relative superiority over Europe came about because of the tendency of the great



Like a colossus strides the United States, unarguably the hegemonic power on the World stage with the military muscle the likes of which has not been seen since the Rome of Augustus

powers to waste resources on wars and arms races. The lessons of the perils of military overspending are also clear from the collapse of the Soviet Empire. And there are already signs that, as the defence burden rises, spending in other public policy areas, including health, education and non defence industries are suffering. Vietnam, and the rise in oil prices due to Middle East instability, were the twin causes of the last major economic slump. The combined US budget and trade deficit soaks up 79% of the world's savings.

### **'It's The Economy Stupid!'**

The American economy's load-bearing capacity is great, but it is still finite. The US has been the World's biggest and most technologically advanced economy since the 19th Century. During the First World War the US emerged as

the world's principal creditor and guarantor of the peace settlement. It failed on both counts, it withdrew from the League of Nations and pursued more protectionist trade policies. The chaos of the 1930's and the desire to establish international monetary order led to the Bretton Woods conference of 1944 and the creation of the International Monetary Fund. This in turn led to the Marshall Plan, whose chief consequence was economic integration

within Western Europe and the spectacular recovery of its economy under US aegis. Wealth has made the US the hyperpower that it is today. But a dynamic new era of globalisation is with us and the question is where the US takes the legacy of more than six decades of successful policymaking. Its biggest challenge is adjustment to the rise of China and the rest of Asia, in particular India as economic powers. China's ever increasing

**“ America's own rise to relative superiority over Europe came about because of the tendency of the great powers to waste resources on wars and arms races. The lessons of the perils of military overspending are also clear from the collapse of the Soviet Empire ”**

voracious appetite for crude oil is one of the main factors in the current high cost of crude. Richard Holbrooke maintains that US-Sino relations will be a key defining factor for any future administration.

The Russian Americanist Anatoly Utkin considers that global demographic changes pose the greatest long-term threat to the US. He notes that in 1950, the industrial world comprised 29% of the world's population. By 2000, this share has been reduced to 18%, and by 2050, it could be down to 10%. If current trends continue, Europe's population could be one-third of its current level by the year 2100. This raises the question of whether the USA would be interested in maintaining the Atlantic Alliance. Utkin quotes the American conservative Pat Buchanan: "What is it that it is proposed that the Americans should defend in Europe? Christianity? It is dying in Europe. Western civilisation? But the Europeans by their own decisions are dooming themselves to disappearing in the 22nd century." Utkin quotes the German Chancellor Bethman-Hollweg commenting to the Kaiser in 1914 that by allying with Austria-Hungary, Germany was acting as an ally of a corpse. Utkin suggests that Americans are now saying virtually the same thing about Europe. He controversially asks will the US be prepared after 2025 to maintain the independence of Kuwait in the face of 100 million strong Iran, or 50 million strong Iraq. The USA will simply not be able to physically create a version of the "Macarthur regency" over the huge Arab world.

### Anti-Imperialist Empire

One of the dirtiest words in the American political lexicon is 'empire.' Clyde Prestowitz in his book "Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism and the Failure of Good Intentions" makes the point that for Americans 'empire' represents the antithesis of the ideals on which America was founded and the very essence of old world wickedness that Americans hoped would evaporate in the light of their own country. In the eyes of the founding fathers the impulse to colonise and to bend other nations to the imperialist yoke was quintessentially a British vice. Thus for Ronald Reagan, communism was not just evil; it was empire. Indeed this is a touchstone issue even today for many Americans, they see their place in the world – a nation blessed by God, whose interests coincide with universal human values. But since the collapse of

Communism, this anti-imperialist note has been muted as policy makers, including the neo-conservatives of the Republican Party, try to accommodate the realities of US hyperpower in an unfriendly world. Prestowitz actually argues that the imperial project of the so-called neo-conservatives is not conservatism per se but radicalism, egotism and adventurism articulated in the stirring rhetoric of traditional patriotism. Real conservatives, he argues, have never been messianic or doctrinal. Robert Cooper in "The Breaking

nations, or because of imperial overstretch.

But the Bush administration appears to believe that American hegemony is an unchallengeable fact of international life. Other states are bound to conclude that the US is too powerful and must be resisted. This administration is altogether more ideological. It believes in exporting democracy. Christopher Preble, director of foreign policy studies at Washington's Cato Institute, calls it "democratic imperialism." In his recent essay "The Unrealism of American Empire," he points out that the proponents of a democratic empire too often ignore the still more powerful forces of nationalism. If that happens, President Bush will be remembered not for liberating Baghdad, but for galvanising international opposition to American power. Mr. Bush's self proclaimed 'victory' over Iraq may prove not only to have been a pyrrhic victory but also to have shattered the pillars of the international security framework the US established after 1945, triggered a bitter transatlantic divorce, and marked the beginning of the end of the era of US global dominance.

Finally, it is always wise in thinking about America to remember that it is at least as unpredictable as any other country. This is, after all, the country that twice in the twentieth century elected a president on an anti-war ticket, who then took them into a world war; the country that, having declared Korea outside its security perimeter, fought a war there; the country that, following this experience, determined it would never fight a war on the Asian continent, but then proceeded to do so in Vietnam; and the country that surprised the world by a sudden and fundamental reversal of policy when Nixon visited China. So today we find an administration that arrived in office rejecting "nation building", currently engaged in just such a mammoth undertaking in Iraq. Domestically, too, there have been sharp swings of mood: prohibition, isolationism, McCarthyism and later the anti-war movement all provide illustrations. In this perhaps, the United States is no different from any other country, except that with its immense power, changes in US policy will have consequences for the world as a whole.

*Comdt. Rory Finegan BA MA MSc is currently serving as a Military Observer on the Golan Heights with UNTSO, stationed in Tiberias as part of Observer Group Golan (OGG).*

**From an American point of view, countries can choose to be allies – "coalition of the willing" – or they can be irrelevant. If they begin to be a threat then they become, potentially at least, a target.**

of Nations – Order & Chaos in the 21st Century," contends that if America is not imperial in the usual sense it is certainly hegemonic: it does not want to rule but it aims to control foreign policy. The hegemony is essentially voluntary, part of a bargain in which America provides protection and allies offer bases and support. From an American point of view, countries can choose to be allies – "coalition of the willing" – or they can be irrelevant, in which case they can be left alone. If they begin to be a threat then they become, potentially at least, a target. History shows that sooner or later hegemony lose their hegemony – either because of the rising power of other