One of the curious developments in intellectual circles over the past few years is that the subject of imperialism is no longer a bailiwick of the Left. To be sure, so long as colonial empires were in strength, there was no denying the reality of European and American imperial expansion. But over the course of the post-war era, as decolonization rippled through the Third World and the formal mechanisms of colonial control were thrown overboard, any insistence on the continuing salience of imperialism became identified with left-wing ideologies. If it did enter mainstream debates, it was inevitably Soviet or, more generically, Communist imperial ambitions that were subjected to scrutiny.

The Presidency of Bush the Younger seems to have put an end to that. Serious discussion of imperialism — not generally, but as an American phenomenon — has suddenly acquired intellectual respectability. Analyses of the "new imperialism" are now flowing out in a steady stream of books, and in organs and magazines associated with both ends of the political spectrum. And there is an unmistakable sense of urgency in the debates. It was clear in the years after 1989 that the United States was searching for a way to maintain its sway over Europe and the South — a condition that couldn't be taken for granted once the specter of the Soviet threat had passed from the scene. Under Clinton, however, the strategy did not exhibit the martial and messianic posturing of the Bush team. The shift toward unilateralism and the evisceration of older covenants had, to be sure, already begun (1). But the sheer aggressiveness of the Bush administration seems to have taken everyone by surprise.

This sense of surprise and genuine concern is evident in the bracing new book by Michael Mann. A macro-sociologist of some renown, Mann has been engaged for two decades in a massive project on the history of power. The two volumes published so far have operated at a fairly high level of aggregation, taking as their focus the long sweep of centuries. It is the belligerence of the Bush team, backed by the loyal Blair, that has spurred him to interrupt his larger project and present an insightful analysis of the "new imperialism". Similar sentiments are expressed by the indefatigable Noam Chomsky: "the choice between [US] hegemony and [world] survival", he


suggests, "has rarely, if ever, been so starkly posed". The open drive for dominance is also recognized by Andrew Bacevich, an analyst of avowedly conservative sympathies, for whom the war on terror since September 11, 2001, is, despite its rhetoric, a "war for the imperium".

It is a remarkable coincidence that this torrent of scholarship is pouring forth almost exactly one century after the classic works on imperialism, which too were motivated by the coincidence between empire-building and military aggression. Two years before publishing his classic Imperialism: A Study in 1902, John Hobson penned an argument about the basis of Boer War that continues to elicit vigorous debate. Central to Hobson's thesis was that the war was carried out more or less directly in the service of the City's financial interests, aided by British mining capitalists (2). This was a kind of political explanation of imperial expansion; conquest was driven by the character of the groups controlling state policy — it was not yet presented by Hobson as an outgrowth of systemic problems of the capitalist economy. It was with the publication of Imperialism that Hobson presented the structural argument, in which the expansionist thrust was an attempt to find a solution to deep and systemic problems of the capitalist accumulation. The main culprit, of course, was the supposedly chronic problem of underconsumption, which led to an overabundance of capital relative to domestic investment opportunities.

**The Two Souls of Hobson**

What is noteworthy, and is often overlooked in Hobson scholarship, is that while he developed the second view at great length in Imperialism, Hobson also continued to utilize the political explanation — in the same text. This is not surprising, of course, if you believe the deeper structural account of imperialist expansion. If there are structural forces — deep functional requirements of the economy — calling for an expansionist thrust, there is a high likelihood that groups invested in such policies will be found in the upper reaches of the state. States cannot remain impervious to the structural demands of their economic base. The significance of Hobson's retention of the political argument is that if you do not buy the case for underconsumption — or any argument that adverts to underlying systemic needs of capitalism — then there is this second

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mechanism at hand to explain imperial aggression. Hobson’s legacy is, then, a dual one.

The point deserves mention because it highlights the subtle shift that is evident in the newer scholarship, a full century after Hobson’s classic analysis. In the years immediately following the publication of Imperialism, the sheer weight of such figures as Hilferding, Luxemburg, Lenin and other figures of the Second International exercised a gravitational pull away from political theories of imperialism, toward systemic and economic ones. Indeed, the most remarkable feature of these works is the virtual absence of any discussion of politics, or the political mediation of the deep economic forces that are taken to be driving imperial projects. There was, instead, a single-minded determination to get at the economic taproot of the phenomenon.

Here is the main difference between theories of imperialism then and now. It is not that structural pressures and constraints are now regarded as irrelevant. Rather, they appear to be taken as an unstated premise for the analyses: present, but largely untheorized. With the notable exception of David Harvey’s remarkable book, The New Imperialism, the role of capitalism’s systemic pressures is simply absent as an object of theoretical investigation. What looms larger is the other of the two legacies bequeathed by Hobson — an investigation of the politics behind US imperial ambitions, either in the form of interest groups, or in the geo-political dilemmas of the post-Cold War world. That behind this is the hulking figure of a capitalist economy appears to simply be taken for granted, and not of any special theoretical interest. Chomsky exemplifies this attitude in a characteristically ho-hum statement that, given the structural power of big business in capitalist political economies, “it is only natural that state policy should seek to construct a world system open to US economic penetration and political control, tolerating no rivals of threats” (3) Q.E.D.

Given the distinctiveness of Harvey’s analysis in the current crop of books, it is useful to consider how he links imperialism to the functional requirements of capitalism. In its basic motivation, there is no doubt that The New Imperialism is an avatar of the classical Marxist theories; Harvey clearly regards imperial expansion as a response to powerful and systematic economic pressures, ones which are peculiar to capitalism. But the architecture of the book also has the markings of state theory as developed by the New Left during the 1970s. For Lenin and Luxemburg, the state did not figure as an independent factor in explaining imperialism, mainly because they functioned with a fairly simple notion of the state-capital relation. In Lenin’s discussion of all the myriad factors which drive imperialist powers, the state is almost entirely absent, owing largely to an assumption, I think, that states basically do what their capitalists tell them to. So once it emerges that the cartels and trusts operating in the advanced economies decide upon carving up the world between them, it is assumed by Lenin that states take

(3) Hegemony or Survival, p. 15.
this as their project as well (4). The legacy of this approach has been an abiding economism in analyses of US foreign policy: behind every twist and turn in policy decisions, a search is initiated for a money trail leading to the business group standing to profit from it.

Harvey does not wish to dispute that states take it as their business to cater to the basic interests of capitalists. What he does argue, though, is that states are sensitive to a different calculus than firms, and while this typically makes them very sensitive to the latter's needs, this very concern will sometimes make them resist capitalists' demands. This is simply transposing to foreign policy what structuralist state theorists maintained about domestic policy — states act in the interests of the capitalist class, not at its behest. The trick for Harvey is to draw the connections that transform this concern into a foreign policy that is imperialist in character. States are taken to have a set of interests and goals that are distinct from those of capitalists. Whereas states are interested in increasing their command over territories, peoples and resources — what Harvey calls a "territorial" or "political" logic of power — capitalists are interested in increasing their control over markets and factors of production. Each has an interest in expansion — and when these interests coincide, the most likely result is a thrust toward imperialism.

This is a theory of decidedly post-Vietnam sensibilities. It is impossible to argue that America's devastation of that country was motivated by the immediate economic concerns of its multinational investors. The only sensible explanation seems to be a geopolitical one, in that US planners were committed to maintaining Vietnam in the ambit of its allies' economic spheres: initially, as a part of the French empire, and later, as a part of the resuscitated Japanese "co-prosperity sphere" (5). In both cases, the state was certainly acting in the interests of its domestic capitalist base, but only in a highly mediated fashion. American capitalists' interests were seen to hinge on the recovery of European and Japanese capitalists, and Vietnam was deemed crucial to both of these latter groups. Indeed, American planners in the decade following World War II propped up rival empires where it might have been expected to shove them aside — Southeast Asia, Africa, and especially the Middle East — sometimes against the wishes of US capitalists, who saw a golden opportunity to move in (6). This is difficult to explain except through a framework which accords a great deal more autonomy to policy planners than Lenin and Luxemburg seemed to.

(4) Lenin, *Imperialism* (Chapter 6).
Harvey is careful to stress that state managers are not just creatures of capitalist demands. But the focus of his book is, of course, the reasons why the former do, on the whole, align themselves with "their" capitalists in foreign affairs. Harvey makes a very plausible argument that the alliance with capital is based on the fact that, as the arbiters of investment decisions, capitalists control the resources which states must wield to further their own particular interests — expansion, defense, and competition with other states. The competition between capitalists based in different regions also generates a political struggle between states, with each state using the levers of diplomacy against rival state-capital coalitions (7). This does not require that businessmen actually capture state institutions and world them to their own ends, though Harvey allows that this is sometimes the case empirically (8). The basic dynamic remains in place even if the halls of power are closed to individual capitalists.

It is puzzling, therefore, that Harvey feels compelled to go further, and place greater explanatory weight on capitalist crises as the mechanism behind imperialism. Having laid out an attractive account of how capitalist competition sucks states into its vortex, he avers that the "heart of the problem that generates pressures for imperialist practices" is not, in fact, the competitive dynamic, but the pressures to find investment outlets for firms when local conditions have dried up. Imperialism is really driven, for Harvey, by the problems of overaccumulation within capitalism (9). Capitalism is, he argues, prone to periodic crises brought about by an abundance of capital relative to the opportunities for profitable investment. During such episodes, the surpluses piling up in the hands of investors must either find some kind of profitable outlet, or face massive devaluation. The thrust outward, into other regions, is driven by the desire to avoid the devaluation of assets that are sitting idle.

It is not at all clear why Harvey should regard crises as the "heart of the problem". If the issue is to explain imperialist ambitions, surely it is enough to show that states seek to protect and expand the advantages that "their" capitals enjoy over those based in other regions. The use of diplomacy to extend the ambit of local firms is to be expected, just as a normal outgrowth of capitalism. It is perfectly fine to argue that these pressures are intensified during times of crisis — and no doubt they are. But factors which intensify a dynamic cannot be presented as its very basis. If we turn to the record of the post-war years — the period Harvey most closely surveys in his book — the warrant for placing greater emphasis on crisis appears thinner still. The pace of US intervention in the developing world has been more or less steady across the period. No doubt, there has been a concentrated drive since the mid-1970s to pry open markets, using the Bretton Woods institutions as battering rams. This is the period of crisis to which Harvey refers. But that

(7) Harvey, The New Imperialism (pp. 101–107).
(8) Ibid., p. 105.
(9) Ibid., p. 107.
has intensified the ongoing project of imperial expansion — it cannot be said to have triggered the process.

*Bush and the New Imperialism*

If we set aside the recourse to crisis theory, what remains of Harvey's explanation for imperialism is that it is a normal outgrowth of competition in the modern era — inter-state and inter-firm. Firms try to expand into new regions, for which they need their state's assistance; and states try to gain advantage in the international arena, for which they need the resources controlled by capitalists. This is in line with one pole of the Hobsonian analysis — what I called the "political" theory. It is also the premise that seems to underlie the analyses by Chomsky, Mann, Bacevich and many others. This pole of Hobson's legacy is present as the common sense of empire studies today.

As "theories" go, this is not very deep. But we ought not to conclude that scholarship on imperialism is a dead end. It simply means that the real analytical work is not in theory-building per se, but historical and institutional — what is sometimes called "middle-level" — theorizing. The analysis of modern imperialism as a general phenomenon is unlikely to present novel theoretical insights; but its forms, the tempo with which it spreads, the means used to achieve it, and its limits in particular periods — this is where the action will be. Not surprisingly, this is also the direction in which the best works gravitate. Three questions in particular are taken up in virtually every serious consideration of the new imperialism: the extent to which Bush presents a break with the past norms of US policy; the place of the new imperium in the history of hegemonic powers; and the limits of American power, relative to its goals and the limits experienced by other empires.

Nobody writing on the new American imperialism thinks the project began with the younger Bush. The question then becomes, what, if anything, is new about the Bush agenda? There is a pervasive sense, not just among academics, but in world-wide public opinion, that *something* changed with Bush's appointment to the Presidency by the Rhenquist Court. The two most commonly mentioned developments are a new unilateralism in international affairs, and the militarism of the Bush administration. And they do appear to be good candidates. The sordid history of the attack on Iraq, the willful disregard for the United Nations, the announcement of an apparently open-ended war on enemies yet to be named — these are only a few examples of the administrations resort to the tactics just mentioned. Bush's rise to power would seem to represent a turn away from the tools of statecraft used by his predecessors.

Mann perhaps comes closest to this view. He recognizes that the formally multilateral institutions inherited from the cold war — NATO, the United
Nations, SEATO etc. — have been and continue to be thoroughly dominated by the US. In this capacity, they easily turn into instruments of American imperial ambitions, instead of being genuinely deliberative bodies. Multilateralism, then, does not by any means act as a block to America's imperial ambitions. To the contrary, it can serve as a more effective means of exerting global control an influence: an intervention with UN backing "brings unconditional permission to use foreign bases, allied troops, the cash to fund the venture, and above all, legitimacy" (10). But why, if multilateralism serves imperial ambitions so well, turn to unilateralism at all? Mann adduces two quite plausible reasons, one tactical and the other strategic. Tactically, the fact that multilateralism generally serves American ends does not mean that it always will. This, to Mann, is what explains Bush's eventual abandonment of the multilateral strategy when it came to Iraq. The countries in the Security Council and in much of the Middle East simply did not accept the administration's arguments that Hussain posed an imminent danger to their security. Finding that it could not carry the Security Council with it, the Bush team decided to go around it altogether.

More important is a shift brought by Bush in the strategic vision behind US foreign policy. Central to this is the view, held by the coterie of neo-conservatives who surround the Bush administration, that even a symbolic deference to the institutions of the cold war is not only unnecessary but downright counterproductive. We live in what Charles Krauthammer has called a "unipolar moment", the United States being unassailable in world affairs. Having achieved such power, what is the point of pretending that it does not exist, or that it will not be used? What is more, the fact is that old allies will, more often than they should, recoil from American judgments on the use of power. To the neo-conservatives, Mann argues, the world order is fundamentally Hobbesian. The disappearance of the Soviet Bloc has created an opportunity to bring order to this world, if not permanently, then certainly for the foreseeable future. If it is to take advantage of this opening, the US cannot be deterred by alliances and institutions from a by-gone age. A unilateral approach, according to this argument, is not the policy of last resort; it is the new strategic vision, appropriate to the times and to America's place in the world.

Mann locates the source of this hubris in the truly extraordinary military advantage of the United States over its rivals. It has become something of a commonplace, perhaps even a tired one, that America's superiority with regard to war-making ability is of an order never before witnessed in world history. Mann argues that this has provided the foreign policy elite with a sense that military force, not diplomacy, is now its comparative advantage in world affairs. Two perceptions have been particularly important in this regard: first, the sense that America's crushing military advantage makes compromise unnecessary, and, when unavoidable, tilts negotiations steeply in its favor; second, the confidence that, when military force is used, the

(10) Mann, Incoherent Empire (p. 82)
technological wizardry of the latest weapons makes it possible to achieve victory without the loss of American lives (11).

A natural complement to the militarization of external relations is a shift in the state policy apparatus, away from the traditional agencies charged with diplomacy — like the State Department — and toward the Pentagon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council. This was, of course, plain to see in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, in the complete marginalization of Colin Powell within the Bush inner cabinet. Paul O'Neill’s vivid account of cabinet meetings in the first year of the administration only confirms the impression from without: that the real decisions were made in closed sessions, outside the cabinet, by Rumsfeld, Cheney, and sometimes Rice — but with Powell shunted to the periphery (12). This hierarchy was even more conspicuous in the weeks following the occupation of Baghdad, when, once the debacle began to unfold, it emerged that the Pentagon had simply ignored what plans State and other agencies had drawn up for a smooth administration of Iraq. In the continuing tussle between the two, it was the Pentagon which set the agenda for reconstruction (13).

Mann sees the ascension of Bush as a real turning point in this dynamic. He does not think that the lurch toward militarism began with Bush; indeed, he points to 1993 as a watershed year, when Clinton announced a new diplomatic orientation in his speech to the Citadel military academy — one which no longer viewed force as a "last resort", but as a live option if others seemed "less practicable". But this, Mann avers, simply amounted to a "drift" toward more aggressiveness, not a genuine turn to imperialistic policy. American military ventures before Bush II were basically reactive, responding to threats, guided by a "pragmatic and defensive notion of military power" (14). It took the ascension of Bush and his coterie of "chicken hawks" to bring the real change from defensive and pragmatic uses of military power to an offensive one.

Would Clinton have invaded Iraq? Counterfactuals like this are exceedingly difficult to pose, but it is probably safe to say he would not have. But this cannot bear the weight of Mann’s larger point, that the turn to militarism itself came with Bush, and that, under Clinton, the use of power was "pragmatic and defensive". It may be entirely true that Bush and his team are committed to a set of policies or goals from which a Democratic administration — or even a less hawkish Republican one — will draw back. But these can be differences within a broader commitment to a militaristic and imperialistic policy agenda. The central point, it would seem, is whether or not the American foreign policy establishment is willing to use its military prowess — and any other instruments it might have available — to dominate other countries, to coerce them, and push through its own agenda. Mann is

right to counterpose a pragmatic and defensive use of power to an offensive one; it is not at all clear that this distinction describes a gulf in the strategic outlooks of Clinton and Bush.

**From the Cold War to the New Imperialism**

A forceful argument against seeing Bush II as the turning point for American militarism comes from a most unlikely source, Andrew Bacevich's superb book, *American Empire*. Bacevich, like Mann, sees American foreign policy as increasingly militaristic and, through that, imperialist. But the transition, for him, comes in two steps: first, with the fall of the Soviet bloc, which removed from the scene the only real counterweight to US hegemony; second, during the Clinton administration, which marked the point at which American foreign policy took a decidedly aggressive posture, based mainly, though not exclusively, on the weight of its military. The fall of the Soviet Union occupies a central place for Bacevich, as it should; it is surprising, in fact, that Mann does not give it greater consideration in his analysis. If he had, he might have asked the natural question, namely, why, once its only real rival disappeared from the scene, should the United State not see it as a chance to consolidate its global power? One reason to demur would be if foreign policy during the Cold War had been driven by defensive concerns, in order to prevent Soviet expansion. But Bacevich will have none of that. If that had been true, then, once the Soviets passed from the scene, American policy makers would have ratcheted down their own aggressiveness on the world stage. They did not. Their actual response was the more logical one: the American elite saw it as an opportunity to bring long frustrated goals to fruition. And these, he says, were two-fold: to open up the world economy, and to establish the US as the preeminent power both politically and economically. The end of the cold war thus allowed the US to resume a path of expansion, which had been impeded by the rivalry with the Eastern Bloc.

In making this argument, Bacevich, who declares that his sympathies lie with conservatives, draws on a venerable tradition of progressive social analysis. Indeed, while he begins his book by acknowledging his debt to, of all people, Charles Beard and William Appleman Williams, the contemporary with whom he seems have most in common is none other than Noam Chomsky. Like Bacevich, Chomsky does not see the ascension of Bush II as signaling an historic shift in American strategy. That came earlier, with the elder Bush, but especially with Clinton. What is crucial here is the nature of this shift. It was not in the principles underlying policy, or in its goals; these have remained constant, not only through the cold war, but even before, across the century. What changed was the environment in which policy was made, and the instruments available to achieve the goals.
Central to the shift in environment was, of course, the end of the cold war, with which the other superpower disappeared from the scene. The status of the US as the sole superpower afforded an historic opportunity to consolidate its hegemony for the foreseeable future. How to go about doing this was not clearly perceived by the elder Bush. He realized in a clouded way that the central challenge would be to establish norms for international affairs which conduced to American supremacy. But, educated in the diplomacy of the cold war, Bush lacked the clarity and the resolve to hone a strategy for US dominance. This was to come with Clinton. Nevertheless, Bacevich notes, Bush "sounded many of the notes which Bill Clinton subsequently wove into a finished composition and rehearsed endlessly through two terms as president" (p. 69).

Interestingly, like Mann, Bacevich places great emphasis on 1993 as a pivotal year in this process. But contrary to Mann, he argues that the consolidation of an expansionist and militarist project began in earnest at this very point. It did not have to wait for George W. to come to power. The clearest signal to this effect was issued in a speech by Clinton's national security advisor Anthony Lake, at Johns Hopkins University, entitled "From Containment to Enlargement". In that speech, Lake announced that the "defensive phase of US strategy, never intended to be more than temporary, had ended" (p. 98). A more proactive policy was to be enshrined, explicitly geared to American interests. What Lake did not specify was the instrument through which this new orientation would be implemented, and the dominance of the American state secured. In the event, it was not long before the military emerged as the natural candidate for the job. If the point was to assert hegemony in global affairs, to establish itself as a clear arbiter of international conflict — the "indispensable nation", as Albright called it — the US would revert to that resource which it held in almost limitless supply. Hence, the two Clinton presidencies produced "an unprecedented level of military activism" (15).

Institutionally, this orientation gave an enormous boost to the Pentagon and the whole military apparatus. Any pretence that the defense establishment was actually defensive in posture was gradually abandoned during the 1990s. The turn from "containment" to "engagement", echoing Lake's call for "enlargement", was officially accepted by the Pentagon as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who enshrined it in their "Joint Vision 2010" document of 1996. With these decisions, the military apparatus would now persevere to actively "shape the international environment", as Clinton described it, in ways that promoted US interests (16). And it would do so proactively. The burdens that this placed on the defense establishment were of an entirely different order than had been expected by much of the Democratic party base. The main function of the Pentagon was no longer to provide defense, but to extend US power and influence. In this way, Bace-

(15) Bacevich, p. 142.
vich dryly concludes, "the Department of Defense completed its transformation into a Department of Power Projection" (17).

The imperative was one of clarifying what the new norms of international affairs were to be. Recognizing this, American policy makers set about consolidating just these norms, central to which was the principle that the United States was to be the primary arbiter of global affairs. And for this, the critical problem was to establish credibility: it would not be enough to assert its power — the US would have to provide what Chomsky calls "exemplary actions", intended as a display of the awesome force at its disposal, and the costs it could impose on those who dared defy it (18). These were of course aimed at recalcitrant states, such as Iraq, Serbia, Panama, Somalia, etc. But just as importantly, they were intended to show that international law and multilateralism would not be accepted as constraints when US interests were at stake. What was needed was a revamping of old institutions to ensure the continuation of US supremacy within them; and then to establish the credibility of these institutions, and of the US's deadly seriousness about maintaining its supremacy.

Thus, Clinton made it a point to ignore or just undermine the United Nations at key junctures. In the intervention in Somalia, the US force simply ignored UNSOM II, the United Nations mission charged with organizing operations in the country. This was not because it impeded US actions in any way; indeed, as Bacevich notes, UNSOM II was basically under US control. The point was to make a conspicuous display of American imperviousness to the niceties of international sentiment (pp. 142-144). Again, with the bombing of Serbia, Clinton turned to NATO, not the Security Council, as a clear indication of America's resolve to be undeterred by international opinion — since China and Russia were not going to budge on their opposition to the bombing. Even more, both Chomsky and Bacevich take a jaundiced view of the claim that the campaign against Milosevic was motivated by humanitarian concerns. Though there were atrocities prior to the bombing, they argue, the really significant buses and ethnic cleansing began after the US initiated its assault. The real motivation was not to stop the killing, but to bring into line a recalcitrant regional strong-man through a dazzling show of force.

Interestingly, it is Bacevich, not Chomsky, who assembles the more careful case for Clinton's central role in this drama. Those readers who expect a major statement about the new, post-cold war imperialism in Hegemony or Survival will be disappointed. The book is more in the way of an update than a foundational statement. But the reason for this is not hard to fathom. The foundational statement about the new imperium came from Chomsky more than a decade ago, in his Deterring Democracy and the Year 501, which was then refined in his analysis of the campaign against Milosevic in The New Humanitarian Interventionism. Much of the argument that

figures in *American Empire* can be observed in these books, with Chomsky's mountainous assemblage of evidence and crystalline logic. It is in fact surprising that there has not been more attention to this fact, that the events since 1989 seem to confirm, in spades, the argument Chomsky has been making for more than two decades: that "containment" was the ideological veneer given to the real heart of American policy, which was, from the start of the century, geared toward "enlargement". The fall of the Eastern Bloc simply removed the obstacle to this goal, and hence also the need for an ideological pretense. It is not altogether surprising, then, that *Hegemony or Survival* does not rehearse these arguments yet again. To Chomsky, they are by now old news.

If the turn to unilateralism and militarism came with Clinton, then what, if anything, is new about Bush II? Both Bacevich and Chomsky think there is something new, though their answers may not be the same. For Bacevich, the difference is exemplified in the attitude of Madeline Albright, Clinton's bellicose Secretary of State. On the one hand, it was Albright who admonished Powell for his dovishness, asking, "what's the point of having this superb military... if we can't use it?" (19). On the other hand, Bacevich argues, Albright was more keen to use military force to coerce and to threaten more often than to wage outright war. The "distinction between force and war" was central to Clinton. What it amounted to was a willingness to deliver military punishment in "precisely measured increments", preferably from afar or from great heights, with little or no loss of American lives, but calibrated to wreak massive devastation (20). The distinctiveness of Bush, we are to conclude, lies in his willingness to take that extra step, committing American troops and undertaking longer, more concerted engagements.

For Chomsky, the difference is perhaps more subtle. The willingness to use force, to break international law, to ignore and periodically snub diplomatic institutions — this has been taken as a prerogative by administrations throughout the cold war and after. Chomsky points to a talk given by Dean Acheson in 1963 to the American Society for International Law, in which Acheson announced that, when it came to defending America's "power, position, and prestige", no legal issues arise — America will simply do as it sees fit. On this count — the options which policy makers arrogate to themselves — there is a direct line of continuity between Acheson, Albright and Rumsfeld. The difference is that Acheson and others confined such discussions and admissions to highly rarified policy circles. Bush and his coterie, however, "are officially declaring an even more extreme policy". At first glance, it seems that, for Chomsky, the real difference is that Bush is more open and indiscreet in his imperial aggression — he is declaring what others simply do silently. But it is surely significant that Chomsky adds the qualifier, "an even more extreme policy" to the comparison with preceding administrations. This bridges much of the distance between him and Bace-

(19) Quoted in Bacevich, p. 48. (20) Ibid., pp. 48-49.
vich. Perhaps the difference between force and war is what defines the "more extreme" policy.

If we return to the issue raised by Mann, it is now clearer how his understanding of Bush differs from that of Bacevich and Chomsky. All agree that Bush II represents a more aggressive and martial foreign policy, aimed at consolidating American supremacy in world affairs. The difference is that the latter two do not see this as the emergence of a militaristic turn in policy — they see it as an accentuation of a strategy already in place, and clearly set out by Clinton in his two terms. Further, they see Clinton's militarism as quite explicitly proactive and strategic, not pragmatic and defensive.

The Contradictions of the New Imperialism

Despite its massive arsenal, its global reach, and its willingness to use it, America remains, Mann argues, a historically weak empire. There are two sources for this weakness, one stemming from the inadequacy of military prowess in the modern era, and the other a consequence of that power itself. Military power is inadequate because, in the end, the real work of empire-building rests on political strength — the building of alliances externally, and the willingness to incur costs internally. American troops can invade a country and topple its rulers, but then what? If the military victory is to translate into long-term control, local politics and social relations have to be brought into line with US interests. A military presence could play an important role in achieving this end during the previous two centuries, but conditions will not allow it today. In an age when nation state and the idea of national rights were not yet widespread, troops could be used in spectacular displays of force to quell local rebellions, intimidate opposing forces, or just coerce local populations into submission. Military power could step in where political power was lacking, at least for a spell. The scope for such use of armed might is drastically reduced in the current period, which Mann calls the age of nation-states. The idea of human and national rights is just too deeply ingrained in world culture to allow for such actions.

If empire is to be secured, it will have to be done through client states, not direct rule. But here too, the rise of nationalism poses a problem. Client states, though under the sway of imperial control, are still nominally free. And in so being, they carry the potential of non-compliance or recalcitrance. In the nineteenth century, refractory elites could be brought into line through the use of force — today, the scope for this is limited, again because of the cultural shift toward national rights. In any case, the increasing militarization of US policy is removing even the possibility of using political mechanisms for empire-building. Political alliances for empire require that clients see some mutual gain from them, and, more to the point, feel that the alliance is of their choosing. But as military threats take the place of per-
suasion, the glue that holds alliances together begins to dissolve. Clients feel offended, lose legitimacy with their populations, begin to withdraw. Even more, the greater the use of force, the more hostile sentiments are whipped up world-wide, further weakening imperial legitimacy.

This is the irony of the new imperialism. It seems to be oriented toward a militarized form to control just at the moment when, compared with previous eras, the scope for its use is narrowing. Mann suggests that, in the long term, this consigns the United States to being a "back seat driver" as an imperial power — having the means to issue directions, impose some constraints, but not actually direct the actions of its minion states. And in so being, it is a weaker empire than those that preceded it. Empire just cannot be a reality in the age of nationalism.

This is suggestive, even plausible, but not entirely convincing. It is true that the American empire cannot be a territorial one, and that it requires a dependence on political alliances. But why take this as an index of weakness? It is not clear that territorial control is needed during the twenty-first century as a precondition for furthering US economic and political interests. Controlling the state is very important when deep structural changes need to be made — when peasants need to be proletarianized, exchange relations set up, populations enslaved, etc. This was the constraint in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the chief dilemma of colonialism, as Marx pointed out in the closing chapter to volume I of Capital. If you cannot create a labor force willing to work for a wage, then you cannot even set up any economic undertakings, much less make money from them. State control may even be a must in cases where the economic agents are merchants, who make their money by securing state-granted monopolies, and through the squeezing of producers (21). In such cases, an inability to control the reigns of government, to be something more than a "back seat driver" could most certainly undermine imperial ambitions.

But when the basic economic preconditions to successful capitalist integration are already in place, and profits are made not by political control, or through state-granted monopolies, what is the need for direct colonial control? All the American state needs to establish if it wants to facilitate the expansion of its domestic firms into new regions is to ensure that such regions are open to investment — since the factors of production are already commodified. The only force that stands in its way is social groups which are committed to maintaining a space for their own local firms — economic nationalists. Defeating such nationalists does not require annexation. It simply requires the cultivation of other groups, which see their own interests linked to their integration with American firms and into the circuits of wider global capitalism. And there are plenty of instruments available to nurture such groups, to elevate their position, to tilt the balance in their favor.

(21) This was an argument advanced by Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, The Fruits of Merchant Capital (Oxford, 1984).
In sum, it is not clear that the inability to directly colonize other regions handicaps the American imperial project in any significant way. This is what makes the militaristic turn in the years after the Cold War interesting. Bacevich and Chomsky are entirely correct in saying that the American project has been a two-fold one, seeking to establish political hegemony while opening up the world for US capital. Seen though this prism, it is possible to understand how the two strategies fit together. As Harvey points out, the state's territorial logic of power is in a relation of interdependence with capital's economic logic. In an age when entire global regions are suddenly opened up for investment, US firms certainly benefit from "their" state's consolidation of its power over others — it comes in useful in drawing up trade agreements, regional economic arrangements, local rights to entry, etc. The military aggrandizement during the Clinton years is therefore explicable, not only through the prism of the state's own agenda, but that of the American multinational firms as well.

As long as the United States can use its political muscle to keep opening the field for its multinational firms, as long as it can ensure a steady supply of needed raw materials and inputs, it should not be hurt at all by being the "back seat driver" of the global order. Indeed, this may even be a source of strength, precisely because it is the invisible force directing local actors, who shoulder the blame in times of trouble.

But it is not at all clear that the Bush slide into war-making serves this agenda so well. The global wave of resentment against the Iraq war and its attendant culture of saber-rattling could very well undermine even the back seat driving. And it can spill over into resentment against that other horn of the imperial bull, US economic actors. One critical weakness of the American imperium today, then, is its slide from Albright's "diplomacy through force", to Bush's more open martial tactics. The constraint against which it runs up is the same one pointed out by Mann — that, in the age of nation-states, people do not take well to the spectacle of one nation attacking another at will. It may very well be the case that the debacle in Iraq has shorn Bush's enterprise of legitimacy, even within elite circles. Certainly, there is ample evidence of concern in the wider foreign policy establishment. The neo-conservatives surrounding Bush came to power determined to capitalize on the opportunity they saw with the disappearance of the Eastern Bloc, and the unique position in which this left the United States. It is ironic that they are now being pilloried, within elite circles, for perhaps squandering that very opportunity.

VIVEK CHIBBER