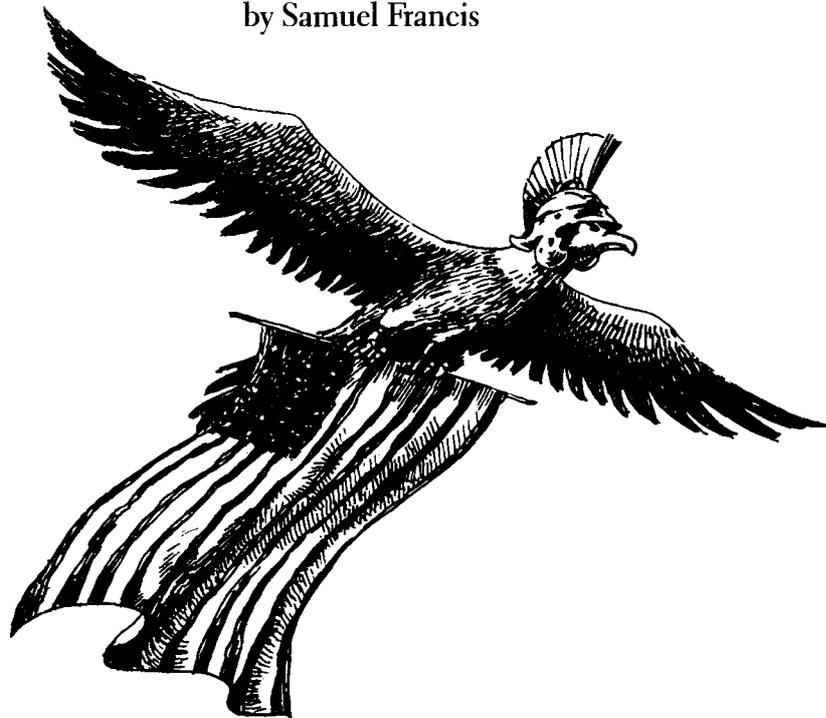


The Price of Empire

Globalism and Its Consequences

by Samuel Francis



Anatol Woolf

I know it will strike many people as odd to call the current foreign policy of the United States a form of “empire building” or “imperialism,” and of course none of our leaders would ever call it that. They would prefer some such term as “peace-keeping” or “spreading democracy” or “nation-building” or “exporting capitalism,” or some other euphemism. Frankly, it would be refreshing, whatever we think about imperialism in general or our current policies in particular, if someone had the integrity of Vergil, who openly acknowledged Rome’s imperial mission in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. As John Dryden translated the passage,

But Rome, ’tis thine alone, with awful sway,
To rule mankind and make the world obey,
Disposing peace and war thy own majestic way.
To tame the proud, the fettered slave to free—
These are imperial arts, and worthy thee.

Or to invoke the imperial mission as frankly as Rudyard Kipling did in his famous lines, “Take up the white man’s burden, /

Samuel Francis is a nationally syndicated columnist and editor of The Samuel Francis Letter. This article was delivered as a speech at a Chicago conference in March on “America’s Intervention in the Balkans,” hosted by Chronicles and The Lord Byron Foundation for Balkan Studies.

Send out the best ye breed; / Go, bind your sons to exile, / To serve your captives’ need.” At least, if we cannot have such exhortations to conquer and subdue even as we liberate and serve, we might have imperialism as an English schoolboy once defined it on his examination paper, according to a story told by the historian Sir Lewis Namier. Imperialism, wrote the budding proconsul, is simply “learning to get along with one’s social inferiors.”

But unfortunately today we are not even permitted such open acknowledgments of our imperial mission, let alone of the domestic price such a mission almost always involves. A war justifiable only on the basis of protecting the stability of our authoritarian client states in the Persian Gulf is justified by promises of punishing Iraqi aggression and war crimes and of building democracy in what remains today, as it was before 1990, the kumquat despotism of Kuwait. Military intervention in Somalia is justified on the grounds of feeding the people of that country, when it should have been obvious that it was first necessary to invent a Somali government to administer the food. The invasion of Haiti is justified by the slogans about building democracy in a country that has perhaps the finest tradition of political assassination in history. And our most recent adventure in empire-building in the Balkans is justified with only the thinnest reference to our national interest. How much more refreshing it would be if President Clinton simply announced, “No, we have no national interest in any of these

places, there is no compelling reason to go there or send troops there or assume commitments there or spend money there, but we are going anyway because we have the power to do it and we want to exercise that power.” That kind of honesty would indeed be a far cry from Vergil or Kipling, but at least we would be admitting what we are doing.

Of course, we do not make such admissions for two reasons. First, other nations would not like it if the United States openly acknowledged it was assuming a global imperial role without the window dressing of humanitarianism and altruism; and, secondly, because the American people would not like to hear that this is what they are being asked to support. Americans, even after a century of “internationalism,” “interventionism,” and crusades against one global villain after another, still do not want to assume the price of empire, still do not willingly send out the best they breed or bind their sons (and now their daughters) to exile without being told that there is some good reason for doing so. To our imperialist friends, this reluctance to send our sons to die in someone else’s wars, or refusal to spend our taxes on war, foreign aid, and the whole vast bureaucracy that administers the imperial system, is narrowly selfish, but the fact is that there are few better reasons to resist imperialism than what are called “narrowly selfish” ones.

Yet if not wanting to be killed in someone else’s war or not wanting to spend your money on it are not sufficiently persuasive reasons for resisting imperialism, there are others, and all of them, the ultimate price tags of empire, can be summarized in the rule that the rise of empire abroad invariably means the decline of self-government at home. There are several dimensions to the inverse relationship between empire and self-government, and the rest of what I have to say today will make the relationship clear.

How is it, then, that the rise of empire results in the decline of self-government, and why is the inverse relationship between self-government and empire true? First, self-government or republican government necessarily rests on an ideal of civic independence, on the idea as well as the reality that the citizens of a republic are self-sufficient, that they govern themselves personally and morally as well as politically. The self-sufficiency, the civic independence, of the citizens of a republic, the idea that the citizens should support themselves economically, should be able to defend themselves, educate themselves, and discipline themselves, is closely connected to the idea of public virtue, as historian Forrest McDonald explains in his book on the formation of the Constitution, *Novus Ordo Seclorum*:

Public virtue entailed firmness, courage, endurance, industry, frugal living, strength, and above all, unremitting devotion to the weal of the public’s corporate self, the community of virtuous men. It was at once individualistic and communal: individualistic in that no member of the public could be dependent upon any other and still be reckoned a member of the public; communal in that every man gave himself totally to the good of the public as a whole. If public virtue declined, the republic declined, and if it declined too far, the republic died.

Now it should be seen at once that this essential characteristic of a republic, the independence or autonomy of its citizens, runs counter to what an empire requires. Alexis de Tocqueville, commenting in a famous passage of his *Democracy in America*, grasped the contradiction, although he expressed it in terms of

the tension between the needs of foreign affairs (what he called “foreign politics”) and the characteristics of a democracy.

Foreign politics demand scarcely any of those qualities which are peculiar to a democracy; they require, on the contrary, the perfect use of almost all those in which it is deficient . . . a democracy can only with great difficulty regulate the details of an important undertaking, persevere in a fixed design, and work out its execution in spite of various obstacles. It cannot combine its measures with secrecy or await their consequences with patience.

These are qualities which more especially belong to an individual or an aristocracy; and they are precisely the qualities by which a nation, like an individual, attains a dominant position.

Tocqueville’s passage sounds as though he was faulting democracy, and probably he was, but the incapacity of “democracy” to succeed at “foreign politics” is one of the former’s virtues. It is indeed difficult to discipline a self-governing people into “persevering in a fixed design” having to do with foreign affairs, for the simple reason that the people are going to have better things to do—to raise their children, earn their livings, and attend to their own complicated and serious business and responsibilities. A self-governing people is simply too busy, as a rule, with the concerns of self-government to take much interest in other peoples’ business. Moreover, those who wish to persevere in foreign designs are unlikely in a republic to have sufficient power to make the people go along with them, nor can they, in a free society, induce the people to shut up about what they are up to long enough to keep it or its management secret. A self-governing people generally abhors secrecy in government and rightly distrusts it.

The only way, then, in which those intent upon “fixed designs” in foreign affairs, especially in the expansion of their power over other peoples, can succeed is by diminishing the degree of self-government in their own society. They must persuade the self-governing people that there is too much self-government going around, that the people themselves simply are not smart enough or well-informed enough to deserve much say in such complicated matters as foreign policy, and that, just as war is too important to be left to the generals, so foreign affairs is just too important to be left to the people. This, of course, is precisely what the State Department and the foreign policy establishment in this country have been telling us ever since World War I and continue to tell us today. We hear it every time politicians and bureaucrats invoke “national security” to avoid telling us what they have been up to or are planning to do, and every time an American President intones that “politics stop at the water’s edge.” Of course, politics do not stop at the water’s edge, unless we as a people are willing to surrender a vast amount of control over what the government does in military, foreign, economic, and intelligence affairs.

Empire, in other words, or even a government to which foreign intervention is continuously important, requires centralization—centralization of authority, decision-making, and discussion—and sooner or later the effort to institutionalize such centralization leads to the decline of self-government, which requires the decentralization that accompanies civic independence.

Moreover, empire requires not only centralization of author-

ity and decision-making but also the inculcation of passivity into the population. Republican government, by contrast, involves civic activism, and the early champions of republicanism in European history were insistent on the virtues of the *vita activa* over the *vita contemplativa*, the contemplative life, which is more consistent with monarchy. Republican citizens must work at being free all the time. They have to go vote, but far more important than voting is the immense amount of time they have to spend in discussing public affairs and informing themselves about them, and even more time-consuming is the actual participation of the citizen in public office or in public duties, including military service. If we are not willing to undertake the burdens of such public duties, then we can find others to undertake them for us, including having a professional army protect us; but in that case we will no longer be a republic, and we may soon find that the professional army is no longer our servant but our master.

Empire cannot deal with that kind of civic activism or with its close relative, civic independence. Empire requires a population that is so passive it is ready to obey the commands of the empire spontaneously, a population that really has no compelling duties and responsibilities at home, nothing else to do with its time, and is ready to go serve in the foreign legion or the U.N. army at a moment's notice. The transition from a republic to an empire requires a transition in the public ethic, from an ethic that upholds the ideal of taking care of your own affairs, your own country, family, and community, to taking care of someone else's. That is the imperial ethic of the two quotations I read earlier from Vergil and Kipling; it is your duty to "rule mankind and make the world obey," your responsibility "to tame the proud, the fettered slave to free," your obligation to "bind your sons to exile," and not to serve your own needs

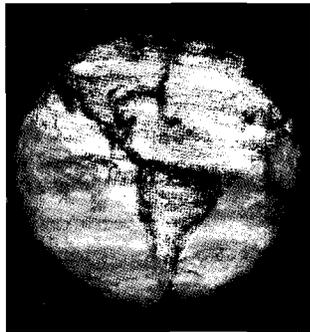
but to "serve your captives' need." You don't want to do that, you say? But, if not us, who? If not now, when? Don't you realize that on the shores of Kuwait there's a sea gull covered with oil that will die? Do you actually think your life or your son's life is worth more than the life of that sea gull? Don't you know that if we don't liberate Kuwait, that sea gull and thousands like it will die at the hands of the most evil dictator in history; that the Somalis will starve; the Balkan War will erupt into World War III; they won't have democracy in Haiti, and all because you're unwilling to sacrifice your life "to tame the proud, the fettered sea gull to free"?

The transition from a republican to an imperial ethic is fairly simple; it mainly requires constant repetition by both sides of the political class, and a readiness to blacken the name of anyone—Charles Lindbergh, Pat Buchanan—who dissents. Once its values have been assimilated by the public, its high-sounding call to self-sacrifice for someone else's interests will prove almost irresistible to people to whom such an ethic had never occurred before. Of course, in addition to the propagandizing of the imperial ethic, the independent social institutions of the republic that sustain civic independence and activism must also be flattened. Independent businesses and farms must be consolidated into giant collectives or corporate organizations administered by managers; local government must be centralized and civic activism, discussion, and participation made impossible; a real and independent popular culture, in which the people produce their own culture, must be deracinated and shaped into what we now call "popular culture," which is culture not produced by the people but what is produced for them by elites lodged in Hollywood, New York, Washington, and other imperial metropolises. An independent popular culture is likely to go on churning out ideas, songs, books, poems, and symbols that are not sufficiently passive for an imperial system to rely upon. If you live under the ethic of civic independence, you know that if you don't take care of your business, your farm, your family, your community, then no one else will; but in an empire, with an imperial ethic, there is always someone else who will take care of your business for you. That is precisely one of the great temptations of empire, as well as one of its great prices; and so the transition to empire involves not just a call to glory and self-sacrifice but also a social revolution by which the independent social institutions that sustain a self-governing people are replaced by institutions managed and controlled by the imperial elites.

This very process took place in the ancient Roman Republic, as the independent yeoman farmers of rural Italy entered the imperial armies and returned from the wars of conquest to find their farms swallowed by the giant plantations of absentee landlords in Rome, their families displaced to the city and dependent on the dole, and the whole social foundations of the Roman Republic transformed into a passive, dependent urban proletariat that was suited only for empire and its tin glories. And the same process takes place today in America and the Western nations, where transnational corporations swallow small businesses and farms and the social foundations of personal and civic independence are vanishing.

The domestic consequences of the transition to empire involve, then, not just the risk of foreign military adventures and the costs of administering an empire, but also a social and political revolution in which independence is replaced by dependence, local and personal autonomy is replaced by centralization, an ethic centered on community and country is replaced

LIBERAL ARTS



D.C. OR MEXICO CITY?

"Drug tests on personnel in the office of Mexico's attorney general has found 424 people, including 241 law enforcement agents, had illegal drugs in their systems. . . . Of the positive urine tests for drugs, 204 showed cocaine, 130 sedatives, 85 amphetamines, and 17 marijuana. Eleven workers tested positive for more than one drug. It did not say how many workers were tested nor whether disciplinary action would be taken."

—from the *Chicago Tribune*, March 19

by an imperial ethic centered on military glory and sacrifice for abstractions, and, in a word, self-government is replaced with rule by others, by a new ruling class dependent on empire and the state and giant institutions that manage it.

But there is yet another price of empire that must be paid, and that is the displacement of the native population. The great American historian of ancient Rome, Tenney Frank, in his *History of Rome*, commented on this consequence of Roman imperialism, comparing Rome as it had been near the beginning of its imperial period in the days of Scipio, the conqueror of Carthage, with Rome as it was at the end of the first century under the Emperor Domitian, a period of about 300 years.

In fact, old Rome is no more. If Scipio could have risen in Domitian's day to see his native city, he would have found stately marble temples and palaces in the place of huts, but the features of the new Romans would have amazed him. The crowd of the Forum would have resembled the populace he once saw at Pergamum [in Asia Minor] and the senators would have differed little from the people on the streets. One has but to imagine the shade of Washington parading the Bowery.

Having conquered mankind and made the world obey, Rome found itself conquered—indeed, replaced—by the conquered. The replacement of the conquering people by those they conquer is almost an inevitable consequence of empire, and one that almost inevitably means the extinction of both the people and the civilization they have created. It is impossible for one nation or city-state or political unit to conquer and rule others without the people of the conquered states eventually entering into the lands of the conquerors. They come as slaves or cheap labor, as merchants, as mercenaries, and as refugees, and if their numbers are large enough they eventually replace the indigenous population. A contemporary apologist for imperialism, Professor Lewis Feuer, in his book *Imperialism and the Anti-Imperialist Mind*, virtually acknowledges this truth in his account of what he calls “progressive imperialism.”

A progressive imperialism like the Alexandrian or Roman was founded on a cosmopolitan view of man, a conception of human worth to be found among all men; it led to what we might characterize as a “participatory imperialism.” A Spaniard, a Gaul, or a Greek might, under the Roman Empire, if he possessed the necessary talent, rise to the highest grades of the military or civil service, or even become Emperor.

To Feuer, the value of imperialism is precisely that it breaks down the narrow-minded parochialism of the conquering people and their culture, as well as those of other peoples and other cultures, and mixes them all together in the “cosmopolitan view of man.” Yet, however glittering this universalist vision of empire may seem, Frank saw its consequences for the Romans clearly:

Even a hasty survey of the Republic is enough to show how the original peoples were wasted and scattered in migration and colonization, and how their places were filled chiefly by Eastern slaves. . . . The assimilation of the foreign element was so rapid that the son of Marcus

Aurelius [at the end of the 2nd century A.D.] seems to be the last emperor of Rome who could claim untainted descent from Italian parentage. That calm temper of the old state-builders, their love for law and order, their persistence in liberal and equitable dealings, in patient and untiring effort, their deliberation in reaching decisions, their distrust of emotions and intuitions, their unswerving devotion to liberty, their loyalty to tradition and to the state are the things one expects to find so long as the old Roman families are the dominant element in the Republic. By contrast the people of the Empire seem subservient and listless, caloric and unsteady, soft of fiber, weak of will, mentally fatigued, wont to abandon the guidance of reason for a crepuscular mysticism. The change is so marked that it is impossible to speak of the “spirit of Rome” or the “culture of Rome,” without defining whether the reference is to the Rome of 200 B.C. or of 200 A.D.

The parallel with the uncontrolled immigration now experienced by the United States is obvious enough, and even the Census Bureau tells us that by the middle of the next century, the majority of the American population will no longer be of European descent. It is not very likely that either the republican ideals of self-government or the other aspects of European civilization on which American civilization rests will survive this demographic revolution.

What this means is that the ultimate price of empire, its ultimate domestic consequence, is the death of the very people and civilization of the society that chooses or is gulled into supporting the path of empire. Not only the destruction of self-government and republican liberty, not only the absorption of independent institutions by organizations no longer under the control of those whose lives they regulate, not only the transference of loyalties and commitments to strange peoples and places with whom we have no connection, and not only perpetual war for perpetual peace are the prices of the imperial path but also the eventual extinction of the very people on whose backs and bones the empire was constructed. Perhaps the old Roman general Scipio himself, who if anyone can be called the founder of the Roman Empire, glimpsed this at the very moment when he stood before the ruins of Carthage; the historian Polybius, who was with Scipio at the time, writes:

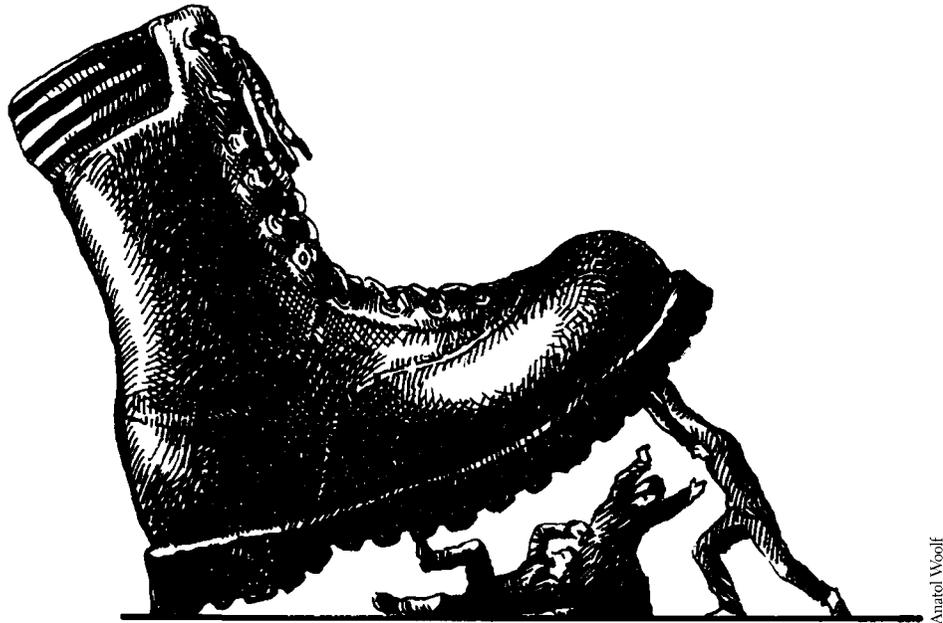
At the sight of the city utterly perishing amidst the flames Scipio burst into tears, and stood long reflecting on the inevitable change which awaits cities, nations, and dynasties, one and all, as it does every one of us men. This, he thought, had befallen Ilium, once a powerful city, and the once mighty empires of the Assyrians, Medes, Persians, and that of Macedonia lately so splendid.

Polybius also tells us that Scipio quoted lines from the *Iliad*: “The day shall come when holy Troy shall fall / And Priam, lord of spears, and Priam's folk.”

Implicit in Rome's victory over its enemy and the beginnings of its imperial sway was the destruction of Rome. For all the glitter and glory that empire seems to promise, that is the grim lesson history teaches us is its real price, and one that Americans would do well to weigh before they find that they and their children are the ones who will have to pay it. <C>

The (New) Ugly American

by Joseph Sobran



The regime we live under—the regime of the United States Constitution—began with a set of clear understandings. One was that the federal government was to be the servant of the people. It was to be confined to the specific powers the people “delegated” to it, pursuant to the general welfare and common defense of the United States. If it exercised powers the people had not delegated to it, it was “usurping” power and committing “tyranny.” A federal government was, of course, a compact among the sovereign states, as opposed to a “consolidated” or centralized government that was itself sovereign.

Few Americans understand this kind of talk today. Words like “delegated” and “consolidated” are known only to people who set out to build more powerful vocabularies. You can hardly explain the difference between “federal” and “consolidated” government to the products of modern American education, because when they hear the word “federal,” they assume it means the same thing our ancestors meant by “consolidated.” For all practical purposes, “federal” is just a fancy synonym for “big.”

The idea of restricting government to “enumerated” powers—a written and finite list—is equally alien to today’s American. The only remedies he can think of for big government are term limits and a balanced budget amendment. The lucid and shared philosophy of the Founding Fathers, imperfect as it was, has also become unintelligible to today’s American, who knows only a set of slogans labeled “liberal,” “conservative,” and “moderate.” Of course there are wide areas of consensus; if you are outside those areas, you are an “extremist.”

Joseph Sobran is a nationally syndicated columnist. This article was delivered as a speech at a Chicago conference in March on “America’s Intervention in the Balkans,” hosted by Chronicles and The Lord Byron Foundation for Balkan Studies.

One of the things we can all agree on—unless we *are* extremists—is that America has a mission abroad: “world leadership.” Both parties and all stripes of pundits agree on that. We must lead the “international community” in keeping peace, deterring “terrorism,” and securing “human rights.” Along with these lofty goals, we must defend our “vital interests” around the world.

To deny this part of the new American creed is to be labeled an “isolationist.” We must never forget “the lesson of Munich,” which our new Secretary of State considers her formative lesson, as opposed to what some people call “the lesson of Vietnam,” or what might be called “the lesson of Sarajevo.” Isolationism led to World War II. Never mind what led to World War I.

I grew up in a family in which Franklin Roosevelt was only a notch below God. My father and uncles had all fought in World War II, and it was unpatriotic to entertain the faintest doubt that the war had been righteous. Not that we had any arguments about this; it was a given. I never doubted it until I was a middle-aged man. And in doing so I was typical of my generation, except that in my case, doubt eventually set in.

Today I marvel at the consensus in favor of that war. It killed 400,000 young Americans in foreign places. It robbed a generation of men like those in my family of a normal youth. It involved the United States in an alliance with the worst tyranny in Western history. It was chiefly waged against civilians, with American planes bombing huge cities without mercy. It ended with communist rule over ten Christian nations. It created nuclear weapons—and we used them. Those weapons were soon aimed at us, putting us in far more peril than we had ever dreamed possible. And Poland, over which the war had started, ended up a possession of one of the original aggressors.

There is a deeply touching painting by Norman Rockwell ti-