

26 October 1967  
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IMPERIALISM

Nearly forty years ago tonight, after a most satisfying dinner in a delightful home in Lexington, Virginia, - a home heated by open Franklin stoves, a home which would not admit that modern nuisance-convenience called a telephone, - I read my first paper before the Fortnightly Club of Lexington, - the Club which is sometimes thought of as the foster parent of our Sphinx Club. We - the members of the Fortnightly - were so full of delicious food that I wondered how I was ever going to survive the reading of a thirty-minute paper. But I did survive - as is evidenced by my presence here tonight - and my paper started an argument. Among the first six members who in the discussion period were called upon to speak, there was a wide and spirited divergence of views and it was not until the seventh member, Dean Moreland of the Washington & Lee Law School, arose that anyone took notice of the fact that the vigorous argument had been started by a paper read by the newest and youngest member of the Club. The title of the paper was IMPERIALISM.

In that first paper I traced the growth of Rome from a city state on the Tiber to the domination of the whole Italian boot, pointing out that each new acquisition ~~made~~ of territory could be explained, at least from the Roman point of view, as a necessary step in self-defense. I then passed to the acquisition of the first non-contiguous territory - the island of Sicily - at the end of the first Punic War. Then, of course, I continued until The Mediterranean Sea had become in effect a Roman lake. I then passed to the history of our own country and sketched briefly the expansion in self defense, of course, of our boundraies which had extended the original thirteen states to the geographical limits of the area, the Atlantic on the east, the Pacific on the west, the St. Lawrence River and the Great lakes on the ~~south~~ north and the Gulf of Mexico and the Rio Grande on the south. Then I passed to the Spanish-American War, which left us with the

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Phillipines, with Cuba and some islands in the Pacific, including what is now the State of Hawaii. There I ended the paper with the question: "Are we, or are we not, an imperialistic nation, a nation whose actions, if not its words, its professed policies, justified other peoples in calling it imperialistic?"

The term imperialism, as we are using it tonight, dates back a scant hundred years to the last half of the 19th century. When we hear it, we are apt to think of the far-flung British Empire or perhaps of the colonial expansion which resulted in the partition of Africa, - a partition to which imperial Germany was a late-comer and hence a disappointed participant therein. How such small countries as Belgium, Holland and Portugal acquired such large and valuable colonial possessions as the Congo, the East Indies and Brazil and thereby became empires in effect, is an interesting sidelight upon imperialism but must not detain us here. What we must note here is that, while imperialism is a comparatively new term, the phenomenon which it connotes is as old as civilisation itself. And before we go too far, it may be well to try to define the term.

As I understand it, imperialism is the policy of a sovereign state which endeavors to establish control beyond its own boundaries over peoples who are unwilling to accept ~~imperialism~~<sup>a</sup>/control thus thrust upon them. Because such peoples are almost always unwilling to accept this alien control, imperialism nearly always involves the use of force - military and naval force - against its reluctant victims. Imperialism has, therefore, often been considered morally reprehensible and the word has been, and still is today, employed extensively in international diplomacy in an effort to discredit an opponent's policy. For a timely example of this, note that Russia daily applies this term to the United States, disregarding with sublime egotism her own rigid control of the countries behind the Iron Curtain.

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Now this polemic, this provocative use of the word imperialism is facilitated by the fact that the precise nature of a nation's foreign policy is sometimes difficult to discover. In the formulation of foreign policy, words are sometimes used to disguise or cloak intentions rather than to express them openly. Occasionally, when reading enunciations of such policy, one may be tempted to recall one of Lewis Carroll's dicta: "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, "it means just what I choose it to mean, - neither more nor less." More seriously, much depends upon the motivation of the foreign office using them. We know from the past that, by subtle or even by hidden means, one nation may endeavor, by its financial, economic, technical and cultural activities, to create for itself an aura of sympathy or friendship or influence, while at the same time it is aiming at literal and actual control. It is this semantic uncertainty which causes some foreigners today to apply the term imperialism to what we ourselves deem an altruistic and often idealistic foreign policy.

We have already noted that, although the term imperialism is a recent one, the phenomenon itself is very ancient. For over a thousand years after 1,100 B. C., three Chinese dynasties endeavored by all then known means to confer upon adjoining countries the blessings of Chinese civilization. In northern India, two centuries before Christ, absolute monarchs ruled over a large empire without advancing any excuses and also claimed suzerainty over tribes far beyond the borders of the empire itself. Western Asia and the sunny shores of the Mediterranean are an unending succession of empires, many of which were built upon the ruins of a predecessor. The Sumerian Empire in Mesopotamia, the Semitic Empire of Sargon, the Second Sumerian Empire, the Babylonian Empire dominated by the personality and intellect of Hammurabi, the Pharaohs on the Nile, the Assyrians, the Persian Empire, Greece under Alexander the Great, and finally the Roman Empire, stretching from Britain to

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to Egypt, from the Ganges to the Pillars of Hercules, - all these, now "One with Nineveh and Tyre," were imperialism, an attempt to dominate completely the then known world. But in what we call the civilized ~~world~~ world, - the world of western civilization - there has been no unifying force since the fall of imperial Rome.

Nonetheless, there have been in the last few centuries attempts to assert power over an area wide enough to be called an empire. New Forces, or in most cases, modern versions of old forces, have provided the impetus toward an imperialism which continues into our own times. Among these modernised forces one may mention nationalism, industrialization, banking, vastly improved means of travel and communication, the discovery of new territories and, finally, a growing humanitarianism. In this more modern form of imperialism we may distinguish four periods:

I. From the middle of the fifteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century, England, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain established empires in North and South America, and in India and the East Indies. When these areas had been well colonized, there followed a period of relative calm for a century.

II. From the middle of the nineteenth century to the year 1914, we have what may be called the second period of modern imperialism. In this period, Russia, Germany, Italy and Japan added themselves to the list of nations seeking to establish empires beyond their borders; some writers include the United States in the list. It is in this period that industrial and financial influence became <sup>a</sup> growing factors in imperialism. The efforts of nations in this period seeking a place in the sun were among the principal causes of the First World War.

III. The third period follows the end of the First World War. For a decade after the signing of the armistice in 1918, great expectations of a

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better world were inspired by the League of Nations and these hopes placed imperialism temporarily in abeyance. But in 1931 Japan attacked China, and soon thereafter the totalitarian states, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Communist Russia inaugurated a new period of imperialistic expansion which in turn led to the Second World War.

IV. The last of these somewhat arbitrary time-segments of imperialism is found in the twenty-two years which have elapsed since the close of the Second World War, - a period which bids fair to be with us some time yet. In this period we have already seen changes which have affected the whole world. Seventy-five years ago Rudyard Kipling could put the song on the lips of Tommy Atkins:

Take 'old o' the wings o' the morning',  
An' flop round the earth till you're dead;  
But you won't get away from the tune that they play  
To the blooming ol' rag over'ead.

Today - and the visible changes have come in the last two decades - today the words are the same but Tommy Atkins has become a "G. I.", the tune has changed and "the blooming ol' rag over'ead" is no longer the Union Jack but has become the Star Spangled Banner. It is literally true that the changed tune is heard and the Stars and Stripes are to be seen from Iceland to the Indian Ocean or, as the old missionary hymn puts it:

From Greenland's icy mountains  
To India's coral strands;  
Where Afric's sunny fountains  
Roll down their golden sands.

In all this area the Banner, now spangled with fifty stars instead of the original thirteen of less than two centuries ago, today represents the most powerful national force in the world. Just how imperialistic is this great nation of ours?

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During the last seventy years, one of the distinctive marks of our foreign policy has been a tendency toward actions of various kinds in foreign lands, - a tendency which I suppose may be well represented by the one word "interventionism." This tendency may have had its origin in Cuba in the last years of the nineteenth century, - an intervention which led to the Spanish-American War, - but I wonder if it - the tendency, I mean <sup>does not go back</sup> <sub>to</sub> the period of our own Civil War when France endeavored to establish an empire in Mexico under the ill-fated Maximilian. If this attempt had succeeded, if Maximilian had actually been crowned Emperor of Mexico, I am inclined to believe that the United States would have "intervened" soon after Appomattox. But that is one of the "if's" of history which need not detain us here.

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That this tendency toward intervening in the political affairs of a foreign land - some people are sufficiently iconoclastic to call it "meddling" in the affairs of a foreign land, - that this tendency is a manifestation of a widespread idealism in the United States is a view held by many competent historians. As a nation, we seem to feel strongly that the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence must be extended to less fortunate peoples, wherever they may be, whatever may be their stage of political development, and however reluctant they may be to accept our ministrations. We were not always militant in our missionary forays; as John Quincy Adams succinctly expressed it: ~~"We were the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all but the champion and vindicator only of our own."~~ With the minor exceptions which have already been noted, we did not really go abroad until after 1945 in our idealistic desire to win and convert other lands to our way of life - especially political life. I suppose that the feeling in this country against involvement or entanglement in the affairs of other lands was never stronger than it was in the years which immediately followed our disillusionment at the end of World War I.

The end of the Second World War, however, found us in a different situation. We had fought a war against fascism and Nazism, - fought it to a successful conclusion. We were forced by circumstances to realize that isolationism as a national policy was no longer feasible. The war had thrown us into the world arena and the fear of Communism prevented our retreating from that arena. And so there ensued a period that has been broadly called "the cold war."

This change from our former isolationism, this new globalism, caused us Americans to realize that we could no longer avoid being involved in the vicissitudes of an imperfect world. But since this cold war was viewed as a moral crusade, it magnified into a high moral mission what was in essence a purely pragmatic involvement in the affairs, both domestic and foreign, of other countries. (PAX AMERICANA, p. 5) "Since we were accustomed to victory in battle and were stronger than any nation had ever been in history, we believed that the world's problems could be resolved if only we willed hard enough and applied enough power. Convinced of the righteousness of our cause, we became intoxicated with our newly discovered responsibilities and saw them as a mandate to bring about the better world we so ardently desired. American military power, consecrated by the victory of the Second World War and reconfirmed by the development of the atomic bomb, joined forces with the power of American idealism to inaugurate a policy of global interventionism."

In the pursuit of this policy we have not used our military power only. It is true, of course, that we have intervened, sometimes rather massively, with military power quite widely throughout the world. But our intervention has also been both economic and political. In the last twenty-two years we have poured about \$120 billion of American money into foreign aid, all in the hope that we could thereby bring about changes in other countries that would reflect our ideals or advance our interests - or both. We have intervened in the politics of some countries, sometimes trying to ~~tax~~ influence their social and political structures and even helping to overthrow the governments of some.

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We have striven to inculcate the principles of democracy in the minds of people who have hitherto known nothing other than absolute monarchy or some sort of tribal existence. Whether we consider this expenditure of time and of effort, of lives and of money, - whether we consider all this commendable or deplorable, it is nevertheless true. We have sought worldwide peace and we have condemned war as a means of settling political grievances, yet we have been an active belligerent in two rather large land wars since 1950, and we have sponsored a number of military interventions. We did not enter into these conflicts and controversies from any sense of adventure or as a quest for territory or in an effort to retain distant colonial possessions. Rather we have striven to contain communism and protect the values and boundaries of what we consider the "free world." As a nation, we feel that a high sense of moral duty has underlain all that we have done around the world.

But this high moral sense poses a serious dilemma for American diplomacy. The dilemma, stated simply, is this: How can we reconcile American ideals with American military actions and - perhaps an even more ~~xxx~~ serious dilemma - how can we make American values seem relevant to a world that appears not to want them or even to respect them? The means chosen to transfer these values to a reluctant and sometimes unadmiring world have troubled some thoughtful Americans. The President and his advisers speak in noble rhetoric of the need to defend freedom wherever it may be threatened and of our responsibility to protect other nations from external and even from internal aggression. Yet the pursuit of this aspiration has frequently led other peoples to believe that our motives may be self-justifying and tinged with more than a bit of hypocrisy.

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We like to believe that western civilization possesses many blessings which it would gladly share with other less advanced peoples, - material blessings as well as those of a less tangible nature. But our efforts to share these good things of life so often meet with resistance or at least with reluctance, <sup>and,</sup> or, as it sometimes seems, those whom we would aid are eager for the material advantages which we offer but are unwilling or unable accept the political and cultural responsibilities which must accompany them if they are <sup>to become</sup> ~~become~~ a permanent possession and confer any lasting benefit. One may be pardoned if at times one becomes pessimistic and recalls the lines

Take up the White Man's burden -  
 And reap his old <sup>re</sup>ward;  
 The blame of those ye better,  
 The hate of those ye guard -  
 The cry of hosts ye humour  
 (Ah, slowly) toward the light:-  
 "Why brought ye us from bondage,  
 "Our loved Egyptian night?"

Sometimes this apparent unwillingness to be humoured from darkness into what you and I consider the light of civilization causes us to wonder at times whether we give sufficient weight to the differences in mores which exist between the peoples of one land and another. We might recall the old, old story of the four men in the Paris cafe who were discussing elephants. And even more to the point, I recall a remark made by the late Major General John A. Lejeune when he was Superintendent of V. M. I. He and I were discussing a problem which had arisen in one of my history classes and on which I had sought his advice. Near the end of the conversation, he said: "Barton, I don't pay too much attention to these Latin-American revolutions; that is just their way of holding an election." Despite our ideal idea of one world, a world made smaller and united by a century of miraculous improvements in transportation and communi-

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cation, there still remain these differences in national and racial mores.

And it may well be that a failure to give due consideration to these differences may lie at the bottom of our continuing expansive idealistic interventionism - or, as some might dub it - our meddlesomeness. There are many people in this country today who hold that national and racial differences are purely superficial, purely external; who hold that the color of one's skin, the configuration of one's skull, the lineament of one's features are merely extrinsic qualities and that the underlying cultural heritage can be reoriented in the twinkling of an eye, by the briefest exposure to western civilization. Does the experience of the last two decades justify such a belief?

When the Roman historian Tacitus was describing the career in Britain of his father-in-law, Julius Agricola, he put into the mouth of the British chieftain on the eve of the decisive battle the words "ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant." ((wherever they (the Romans) create a desert waste, they call it peace.)) From this sentence arose eventually the expression Pax Romana, a Roman Peace, - a peace of subjugation. The Romans did not feel that they were creating a desert waste in Britain or in any other of a score of countries which one might mention (Carthage, of course, excepted). The Britons saw it from an entirely different point of view. And who among us can look upon the effects of our interventions from the point of view of those in whose affairs we are gratuitously interesting ourselves? How can we make them understand that our motives are high? How can we persuade them not to class us with the other imperialistic nations of history? How can we keep them from thinking that we are trying to create a Pax Americana? Surely such are among our problems.

Of course, all that I have written here has been set down on paper under the dread threat of thermonuclear warfare. Our intervention, our imperialism, if you are willing to allow that term, is conditioned by that terrible threat. We know that we are living in a time that has justly been described as a peace

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of terror. But, since we do possess a present superiority in thermomuclear weapons, possess enough, according to good authority, to deter any other nation from attacking us, we seem determined to pursue further our present course in foreign affairs. Whether all this is congruent with our own best interests <sup>is</sup> debated now and perhaps destined to be more widely debated in the near future. A presidential election is in the offing. \*

Sometimes a word of advice out of the past <sup>is</sup> relevant and I can think of no better way to bring to a close this ramble into our foreign affairs, than to quote the words of John Quincy Adams - words taken from an address which he delivered in Washington July 4, 1821:

"Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will be America's heart, her benedictions, and her prayers. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will recommend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and by the benignant sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standards of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force. . . . She might become the dictatress of the world. She would no longer be the ruler of her own spirit."

\* And in the meantime, <sup>to</sup> demonstrations are the order of the day.