

C. Akça Ataç

**RE-ENTERING THE COSMOPOLITAN PHASE OF IMPERIUM:
REMARKS ON OBAMA’S PRESIDENCY
AND DISCUSSIONS OF AMERICAN EMPIRE**

C. Akça ATAÇ*

Generally, one must first learn many things before one can judge another’s action with understanding.

Marcus Aurelius, *Mediations*, XI.53.

Abstract

A worldwide consensus would suggest that the legacy of the first and second Bush administrations was imperial in a way unprecedented in US history. The new presidency of Barack Obama, now, seems to promise to undo this legacy of empire, which had manifestly resulted in the lowest popularity ratings for an American president in history. Obama’s electoral-campaign discourse and first presidential appearances on the world stage have, in fact, reinforced his image as “America’s first cosmopolitan president.” This positive emphasis on cosmopolitanism should be highlighted as one of the rare moments in US history given the rather unenthusiastic reception of the term in American political culture, which highly contests its glorification by European political theorists. This paper strives to reassess the discussions of American Empire in the light of the cosmopolitan touch on the horizon, from the hands of Barack Obama. In doing that it aims to provide an overview of the critical literature on the imperial attributes of the US, put forward a generic definition of empire in the light of imperial adaptation studies as well as to measure the possible impact of a cosmopolitan discourse on ending the regional and global apprehensions of an imperial US.

Key Words

American Cosmopolitanism, American Empire, Obama Presidency, Meliorism, Neo-Wilsonianism, Universalism.

* Instructor in Diplomatic History , Çankaya University, Ankara.

Introduction

For the student of international relations, it has become very difficult to escape the heated debate concerning the new nature of empire in the twenty-first century.¹ In his article published in *International Affairs* in 1962, Eric Voeglin assured his reader that

the age of empire is coming to its end in our time. A period of five thousand years, characterized by the attempts to represent mankind by means of a finite organisation in the present, has run its course and reached an epoch in the original sense of suspense.²

Half a century later today, we witness discussions on whether the topic of empire has once again become relevant to world politics. It has acquired so common a usage that some disciplines have begun to treat it as a legitimate category in their assessments of global politics, economy, and culture. Of course, the way the United States has been conducting its foreign policy since 2003 has played a great role in the rise of such debate.³ The American Empire is no longer a term used only by a handful of leftist intellectuals criticizing their government.⁴ It has consequentially come to represent the first empire of the twenty-first century and inspired the scholars to adapt the perspective of empire in their attempts at understanding and

¹ Please see Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire*, New York, Penguin, 2004; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2001; Denis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present*, New York, Basic Books, 1997; Philip Longworth, *Russia: The Once and Future Empire from Pre-history to Putin*, New York, Macmillan, 2006; Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

² Eric Voeglin, "World-Empire and the Unity of Mankind", *International Relations*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (April 1962), p. 188.

³ Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire*, New York, Penguin, 2004 and Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2005.

⁴ Noam Chomsky, *Imperial Ambitions: Conversations on the Post-9/11 World*, New York, Metropolitan Books, 2005.

projecting on not only American but also Russian, Chinese, and even Turkish politics.⁵

A worldwide consensus would suggest that the legacy of the first and second Bush administrations was imperial in a way unprecedented in US history since the nineteenth century. The new presidency of Barack Obama, now, seems to promise to undo this legacy of empire, which had manifestly resulted in the lowest popularity ratings for an American president in history. Obama's electoral-campaign discourse and first presidential appearances on world stage have, in fact, reinforced his image as "America's first cosmopolitan president."⁶ This positive emphasis on cosmopolitanism should be highlighted as one of the rare moments in US history given the rather unenthusiastic reception of the term in American political culture, which highly contests its glorification by European political theorists. This paper strives to reassess the discussions of American Empire in the light of the cosmopolitan touch on the horizon from the hands of Barack Obama. In doing that it aims to provide an overview of the critical literature on the imperial attributes of the US, put forward a generic definition of empire in the light of imperial adaptation studies as well as to measure the possible impact of a cosmopolitan discourse on ending the regional and global apprehensions on the imperial US.

Is there an American Empire?

Whether or not there is an American Empire is a long-standing question. Prior to September 11, the general tendency was to say that there had never been one, despite the undeniable signs of imperialism, which were the attempts by the US to extend spatially the single-handed application of power beyond its borders. Empire is known to be a political entity which expands spatially by acquiring colonies and single-handedly establishing in those colonies a government encompassing all issues and areas from politics

⁵ See, for example, Joseph E. Fallon, "The Neo-Ottoman Empire", *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, April 2006, <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org>; Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese Empire and What It Means for the United States*, New York, Basic Books, 2003; Celeste A. Wallander, "Russian Transimperialism and Its Implications", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No.2 (Spring 2007), pp. 107-122.

⁶ Joseph Shattan, "The Four Pillar of Obamaism", *The American Spectator*, 05 May 2009, <http://spectator.org/archives/2009/05/05/the-four-pillars-of-obamaism/print>.

to social life. The rhetoric of empire always suggests an improvement in the current situation of the colonies and a departure from chaos, which would not have been possible without the imperial intervention. The episode of such a tangible empire with proper colonies and militaristically aggressive attitude was a brief chapter in American history which only lasted from 1898 to 1912. One could extend this period to the independence of the Philippines in 1946, although, by then, the single-handed application of power had for sometime been softened.

Numerous American imperial undertakings, on the other hand, were considered to be somehow different from imperial governance, whose typical feature is the permanent control over the use of arms, administration of justice and management of trade. Such an empire, according to Dominic Lieven, is “a specific polity with a clearly demarcated territory exercising sovereign authority over its subjects who are, to varying degrees, under its direct administrative supervision.”⁷ Thus, the US evidently escaped this definition, which has been welcomed by the imperial studies as one of the most accurate definitions for the term ‘empire.’⁸ On the grounds of falling away from the definition of the quintessential empire, the US was believed to stand alone within the Western experience of imperialism and this non-empire status was, in truth, one of the reasons for the “uniqueness” of the American political conduct.⁹ In this respect, it challenged the idea of a “monolithic West” and emphasized that the US had not partaken in the imperial experience of mankind.¹⁰ This viewpoint has not yet faded away and the scholars still currently argue that the US has grown into a world power but not an empire. What is more, according to the ethos provided by the nineteenth-century American exceptionalism, the US is supposed to be against all forms of empire, whether it is built by the Old World or the Soviet

⁷ Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*, London, Pimlico, 2003, p. 3.

⁸ See, for example, Ross Hutchings, “Empire and the State: A Critical Theoretical Assessment”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (2006), pp. 429-438; James Kennedy, “Responding to Empire: Liberal Nationalism and Imperial Decline in Scotland and Quebec”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 284-307.

⁹ Amy Kaplan, “Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture”, in Kaplan (ed.), *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1993, p. 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

Union: empires are first of all doomed to corrupt and decline. Secondly, they tend to become uncontrollable and even evil.¹¹

This opposition to the argument that America is an empire, however, has been overshadowed by the increasingly unrestrained usage of the term American Empire in the past decade. At the times when the US was commonly seen as fit to be excluded from the list of world's empires, the 'American Empire' had only an informal pejorative meaning employed to criticize US foreign policy. It was even occasionally called by the oxymoron 'the empire of chaos.'¹² Subsequent to September 11 and the intervention in Iraq, the political and military discourse has, however, more and more embraced the language of empire by emphasizing some countries' need for enlightened foreign administration to govern them in order to terminate the rule of chaos and restore the order of democracy and the rule of law. Becoming an empire would be, in fact, a small price to pay for Americans, if it meant preventing the chaos in 'rogue states' from spreading over the world order. In his controversial book *In Praise of Empires*, Deepak Lal argues that when Woodrow Wilson terminated the Age of Empires at Versailles, he also gave way to a hundred years of "global disorder and economic disintegration."¹³ In order to restore worldwide peace and prosperity, since then, the US has been needed in the new world order to assume an overtly imperial role.

At the presidential level, of course, the acknowledgement of a territorial empire has never been made and, on this ground, the US has remained an unnamed empire. Still, although "imperial denial" persists in administrative circles, America has come to be increasingly perceived as an empire in foreign policy analyses, particularly within a historical context. As journalist Robert Kaplan suggests, it is inevitable that "future historians will look back on the 21st-century United States as an empire as well as a

¹¹ Daniela Rossini, "Isolationism and Internationalism in Perspective: Myths and Reality in American Foreign Policy", in Rossini (ed.), *From Theodore Roosevelt to FDR: Internationalism in American Foreign Policy*, Staffordshire, Keele University Press, 1995, pp 12-15.

¹² Alain Joxe, *L'Empire du Chaos*, Paris, La Découverte & Syros, 2002.

¹³ Deepak Lal, *In Praise of Empires: Globalization and Order*, New York, Palgrave, 2004, xxiv.

republic.”¹⁴ Also in the eyes of Lal, the US, although “informal and indirect,” is “indubitably an empire” seeking “not only foreign but also aspects of domestic policy” throughout its area of influence.¹⁵ Therefore, despite its anti-imperialist foundations, the absence of empire in US history and all the pejorative meanings attached to it in American political culture, the US has been standing as the quintessential example of empire in the twenty-first century and, as will be discussed later, Obama's cosmopolitanism does not put an end to the discussions of American Empire, but rather transforms them. Let us now take a closer look at America's empire from the perspectives of adaptation and imperial studies.

Adapting ‘Empire’

‘Empire’ has never been a simple topic. Although in its very brief sense it could be argued that all philosophies of empire aspire to improve the current world order through economic, political, and cultural means, there are many forms of empire and their underlying intellectual vindications do vary. An empire cannot always be understood with respect to its observable features such as borders, military interventions, civil-service networks and foreign trade. In most cases, the observable empire is not an objective in itself, but a means to a greater end. This point takes us to the intellectual foundations of empires, which in fact encourage and justify the actions dictated by imperial policies. Nevertheless, since the history, theories, and reality of empires have not been communicated in the way, they should have been to the disciples of social sciences, one version alone – and that is obviously the dark and malign version – has come to represent the meaning of empire. In this respect, the imperial studies should be concerned with restoring the meaning of empire in the social sciences in a way to eliminate the catchphrases that have for long run their courses and to stress that the philosophies of empire cannot be reduced to imperialist ideologies. They emerge as products of the complex interplay of various novel or perennial ideas, traditions or dogmas. In order to acquire a complete knowledge of one empire and launch a project of adaptation, the intellectual elements that contribute to its philosophy should be taken into account.

¹⁴ Robert Kaplan, *Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos*, New York, Random, 2002.

¹⁵ Lal, *In Praise of Empire*, 63.

Before proceeding onto the American adaptation of empire, the vast problematic inherent in all imperial adaptations deserves some elaboration here. Regarding what the imperial studies show, it may be taken almost as a rule that the adaptations of empire in history has hardly honoured the philosophy of empire that puts forward an ideal notion of world order, governance, prosperity, and peace. Therefore, it should not be surprising for the student of politics and international relations to find out, for instance, that Polybius's theory of empire was not "an exact representation of the true state of Roman politics."¹⁶ Because of the constraints set by the *realpolitik*, theory and practice of empire do not coincide perfectly. The well-intended, well-argued intellectual attempts do not suffice to improve the existing imperial implementations and reverse the degeneration and decline of empires. The adaptation studies will attest that all historical attempts at becoming empire have failed to live up to the original cosmological dream of the wise men of human kind.

All sorts of adaptation, may it be biological, cultural or political, require the existence of a replicable source, "an original"¹⁷ and they, by rule, seek to perpetuate, if not to supersede, the notable features of this original. The adaptation studies traditionally work on the principle of creating comparative models. The success of the adaptation is judged through those models that compare the original at hand with the end product.¹⁸ The end product obviously emerges at the end of the process of adaptation and is a version of the original. Within the limits of this article, the end product, which is of particular interest to us, is the US in the twenty-first century – of course, as understood from an imperial perspective. It is argued here that the conviction suggesting empire was a brief episode – a lapse even – that erupted in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War but has lost its force even under the Obama presidency. What Amy Kaplan calls "the absence of empire from the study of American culture,"¹⁹ has been replaced by a very conscious quest for empire.

¹⁶ Michael Curtis, *The Great Political Theories, Volume I*, New York, Avon Books, 1981, p. 122.

¹⁷ Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classical Novel*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁹ Kaplan, "Left Alone with America", p. 11.

While elaborating on the American version of adapting an imperial discourse, pinning down the essentials of the emulative imperial type is crucial. It is a grave error to consider the military empire or the empire of conquest as the only possible form. Contrary to common knowledge, imperial designs and ideologies have at the outset aimed to be benign, non-violent, constructive and even non-territorial, since some ancient philosophies, such as Stoicism, suggest boundless space. In these definitions, the common elements appear to be only the existence of a metropolis in an advantageous negotiating position, the metropolis's self-assumed role as the representative of mankind, the perception of a peace-building, posterity-promoting order prescribed by the metropolis, and the existence of an already chaotic or a potentially chaotic periphery. However, no consensus exists among the different perceptions of empire regarding the questions of the methods to be employed, the rhetoric, the socio-economic models built, the citizenship, and the type of expansion envisaged.

Yet, empire has always been an enchanted dream for man. It is an ideal as old as the emergence of the ancient notion of *oikoumene* that could be traced back to the Near Eastern empires of antiquity.²⁰ The word *oikoumene* stood for the known, inhabited part of the world. The ancient ruler's ambition to render the harmonious order of the universe superior in the inhabited world, for the selfless sake of humanity, i.e. in the name of emancipating man from the dark forces of chaos, set the tone of the first rhetoric of empire. In the late period of ancient Greece, *kosmos*, the universal order, had come to be synonymous with *oikoumene* and acquired a more frequent usage over the course of time. This primordial mission, subsequently conferred upon by Romans for the sake of humanity, was thought to be over only when the edge of *oikoumene* had been reached. That would be when the universal order and the order in this world had become identical. The most powerful tool to fulfill this mission would be the imperial law, as demonstrated in Cicero's political theory.²¹ The goal of emancipating man could not be achieved unless harmony on earth confronted no obstacles in terms of boundaries. Therefore, empire should cover an "unbounded space" and progress on the principal of "territorial

²⁰ James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 37.

²¹ Curtis, *Great Political Theories*, p. 123.

finiteness.”²² In compliance with this ideal notion of empire, the area of imperial jurisdiction, or if we are to adapt the Roman legal language, the *orbis terrarum* ought to be dynamic, ready and fully enhanced to be spread around the entire world of man.

According to this brief conceptual framework, the main features of the original empire could be summed up as such: First, its ethos should be defined through a self-assumed role to act as the saviour of first its own people and then entire humanity. Second, it should have claims to be in possession of an undisputable knowledge or definition of how the universal order ought to be. Finally, it should acquire the requisite negotiating power to create a code of law with universal jurisdiction to govern the world order. In addition to the features highlighted above, Lieven states that empire is a polity that does not require the “explicit consent of its peoples.”²³ The imperial metropolis with an exclusive negotiating power depends on neither extraordinary military force nor consent; it pursues policies of integration, or assimilation, on different levels of governance independent of the consent of the governed.

After Adaptation: The US as the End Product

The history of mankind has taught us that in the discussions and politics of good global society, the inevitability and the resurrection capacity of empires could never be underestimated. Even Mark Twain, who served as the vice-president of the American Anti-Imperialist League and fiercely opposed the colonisation of the Philippines, admitted, of course rather cynically, that mainly because the human race “never changes,” it has “in the course of ages” repeatedly sought to establish similarly superior civilisations and governments tend to gravitate towards empires.²⁴ The imperial tendencies in history are not anomalies; they are integral to the natural order of the universe. According to this viewpoint, which will also be defended in this essay, empire is an attractive, natural concept because of its ability to

²² Voeglin, “World Empire”, pp. 173-4.

²³ Lieven, *Empire*, p. xiv.

²⁴ Mark Twain, “The Coming American Monarchy II”, in Maxwell Geismar (ed.), *Mark Twain and the Three R's: Race, Religion, Revolution – and Related Matter*, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973, pp.241-2.

appear and reappear in many forms in the history of the world or global politics, economy and culture.

The anti-imperialist founding ethos of America and the visible contempt embedded in its discursive existence for the empires of the Old World laid the foundation of the isolationism doctrine that remained in effect until the nineteenth century. George Washington's emphasis on non-entanglement and James Monroe's doctrine of "mutual non-interference between Europe and the United States" helped the US distance itself from imperial pretensions.²⁵ Nevertheless, as historians have established, isolationism was designed specifically "to maintain a watchful distance" from Europe and was conveniently ignored when America interfered with Asia and Latin America. Therefore, isolationism did not stand for an anti-empire principle in the conduct of American foreign policy. Moreover, it had not prevented America's subsequent inclination towards becoming the world's self-appointed rescue team and unique legislative body. The Founding Fathers' warnings were meant to shield the US from excessive foreign entanglements, such as ventures that would "extend the powers of the state" and exhaust its resources.²⁶ What has most forcefully paved the way to the contemporary discussions of American empire is the subsequent emergence of internationalism as encouraged by American Exceptionalism. The notion of Exceptionalism had been nourished by the "belief in the unique destiny of America as a herald of progress in the world."²⁷ It has provided crucial justification to the self-appointed role of the US to champion moral, humanitarian and 'democratic' values across the globe. The universality of those values, however, still remains highly problematic.

In adaptations of empire, the imperial center's ability to create and reinforce a legal code that is superior to other national or international laws occupies a cardinal place. In his philosophy of empire, Cicero highlighted the requisite of arriving at "one law, eternal and unchangeable, binding at all times upon all peoples." Those who denied the authority of this law would

²⁵ Daniela Rossini, "Isolationism and Internationalism in Perspective: Myths and Reality in American Foreign Policy", in Rossini (ed.) *From Theodore Roosevelt to FDR: Internationalism in American Foreign Policy*, Staffordshire, Keele University Press, 1995, p. 12.

²⁶ Lal, *In Praise of Empire*, p. 63.

²⁷ Rossini, "Isolationism and Internationalism", p. 13.

“abandon” their better selves, hence becoming subjects of severe punishment.²⁸ Claiming universal authority for American legislation has become one of the trademarks of US foreign policy. The American Constitution is increasingly influencing international law under the auspices of the United Nations, and as a result, the US has enlarged its sphere of influence from the western hemisphere to the rest of the world. In their much discussed, widely cited book, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest that “[t]he contemporary idea of Empire is born through the global expansion of the internal US constitutional project.”²⁹ The attempts at widening the jurisdictional area of this project, spectacularly intensified through the rhetoric of the war on terror in the twenty-first century, has granted the US a centrality that one can easily suggest is imperial.³⁰ When necessary, the US has undermined the international legal code in whose construction it had played such a major role, and has single-handedly acted on its own dictates without facing repercussions or sanctions.

The Founding Fathers’ adaptation of a mixed constitution originally put forward by Polybius has been stressed as sound proof of the anti-imperialist roots of the US.³¹ The checks and balances mechanism is theoretically meant to guarantee the separation of powers, and prevent the dominance of the executive power over the legislative and jurisdictional branches. However, the foreign policy of the first and second Bush administrations, namely the American approach to Afghanistan and Iraq, has launched intellectual queries on whether or not the US executive power usurped the authority of the legislative and judicial branches. These queries have understandably overlapped with the ongoing quests for an American empire. Arthur M. Schlesinger, in his best-selling book *War and the American Presidency*, argues that imperial power in the form of an enhanced executive power (as invested in the presidency) has not been a common tradition in the American politics. It first appeared at the beginning of the Cold War and should thus be treated as an anomaly. What is striking here,

²⁸ Cicero’s *On the Commonwealth* quoted in Curtis, *Great Political Theories*, p. 136.

²⁹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 182.

³⁰ Rob Kroes, “American Empire and Cultural Imperialism: A View from the Receiving End”, in Thomas Bender (ed.), *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 2002, p. 299.

³¹ Curtis, *Great Political Theories*, p. 122.

Re-Entering the Cosmopolitan Phase of Imperium: Remarks on Obama's Presidency
and Discussions of American Empire

according to the author, is that the neo-conservative visionaries of the Bush administration have ventured to render this anomaly a rock-solid tenet of American foreign policy in the twenty-first century.³²

In response to Schlesinger, Charles Savage reminds readers that what has come to be called “the theory of inherent power” is in fact the vindication of an “imperial presidency.” The concept of inherent power suggests that the US Constitution allows the president to seize “concentrated governmental power” and act on it.³³ Democratic, and not Republican, presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Lyndon Johnson used this inherent power to fight Communism. Today's neo-cons have merely followed the footsteps of these leaders, and through this legacy have rediscovered this expanded presidential power as an indispensable tool in the war against terrorism.³⁴ The extraordinary political atmosphere in post-9/11 America has made it possible to expand the presidential authority even further. Current assessments of the Bush administration now commonly point out that Dick Cheney played a crucial role in merging international politics with the American presidential agenda. Cheney revived the concept of inherent power and transformed its ambiguity into an integral component of American politics. Savage is concerned that “every repetition” of this concept in the presidential discourse “imbeds that principle more deeply” as part of the Constitution and “expands it to new purposes.”³⁵ Nevertheless, the inherent power has already acquired much currency and commonality.

Bush's aggressive strategies catalyzed America's self-appointed role of unilateralism in world politics. The toll that this fact has taken on the US has been heavy. In the eyes of the rest of the world, it has become equated with twenty-first-century empire building. Despite the ‘fresh start’ promised by Obama in international politics, especially with respect to world peace, multilateralism, and climate change, reversing the damage may verge on

³² Arthur Schlesinger, *War and the American Presidency*, New York and London, W.W. Norton, 2005, p. 25.

³³ Charles Savage, *Takeover: The Return of the Imperial Presidency and the Subversion of American Democracy*, New York, Boston and London, Little, Brown and Company, 2007, p. 8.

³⁴ Savage, *Takeover*, p. 17.

³⁵ Savage, *Takeover*, p. 44.

impossible. What is clear, however, is that Obama's presidency heralds the beginning of a new cosmopolitan era in US foreign policy.

A Non-Cosmopolitan Country

In reaction to the surge in patriotism in the aftermath of September 11, Martha C. Nussbaum opened "a new democracy forum" to discuss the potential risks of the war-on-terror discourse. Among the participants of the forum were prominent political authors such as Richard Falk, Charles Taylor, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Michael Walzer.³⁶ As a corrective measure to the rising nationalism and aggressive patriotism among Americans, Nussbaum proposed the concept of the 'cosmopolitan citizen' who would put "right before country and universal reason before the symbols of national belonging."³⁷ Referring to the great Stoic Marcus Aurelius, Nussbaum argued that "the damage done by faction and local allegiances to the political life of a group"³⁸ by the hands of American patriots could be undone by cosmopolitans. The cosmopolitan touch would mean a departure from the historically specific, moral and political meaning attributed to being an American and a commitment to the larger global community. In other words, a kind of mental "exile" was needed to detach Americans "from the warm, nestling feeling of patriotism, from absorbing drama of pride in oneself and one's own."³⁹ Cosmopolitanism, which emphasizes not nationality but humanity, challenges America's political particularism and imagined national identity created by analogies and symbols such as the City upon a Hill. It reminds the citizens of the world that "we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kin, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship."⁴⁰ Feeling loyalty not only to your kinship, or fellow Americans, but every member of the mankind, regardless of what kind of tradition, religion or family value that s/he observes, would be the change of

³⁶ Martha C. Nussbaum (ed.), *For Love of Country? In a New Democracy Forum on the Limits of Patriotism*, Boston, MA, Beacon Press, 2002.

³⁷ Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism", in Nussbaum (ed.), *For Love of Country*, p. 17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁹ Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism", p. 15.

⁴⁰ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, New York and London, W.W. Norton, 200, p. xv.

heart required by cosmopolitanism. Such definition of a new political loyalty, however, has not exerted much discursive influence on the US politics.

Similarly, Nussbaum's cosmopolitan initiative, which aimed at a reform of education and politics to cure the vengeful paranoia spreading across the US in the post-September 11 era towards the non-American, non-Christian nations, did not bear any substantial results. Americans came to perceive themselves particular among the world's nations as the indispensable nation. Furthermore, the concentration of the Bush administration on "homeland security" rendered "the approach to imperial governance" visibly "harder and more coercive."⁴¹ In this extraordinary political atmosphere, any attempt to overlook patriotism and commitment to American citizenship as "narrower loyalties" would be vain and underappreciated.⁴²

Among the responses that Nussbaum received, the objections appeared to be two-fold. First, some readers, such as Benjamin K. Barber, were not comfortable with her stress on the lack of cosmopolitanism in the American constitutional experience. Barber criticised Nussbaum for her depiction of the US Constitution as deprived of the "substantive values of justice and right" – two very cosmopolitan imprints. In his opinion, the Founding Fathers succeeded in "uprooting and rerooting" and thus reconstructing the identity of a nation with "a remarkable mixture of cosmopolitanism and parochialism."⁴³ The second objection concerned the 'thinness' or insufficiency of cosmopolitanism in the face of the problematics of globalisation and the chaos of world politics. Richard Falk, for example, held that proposing "a visionary cosmopolitanism" in the place of "nationalist patriotism" would not immediately precipitate "the human state, the humane region, and . . . a decent inclusive globalism."⁴⁴ As long as terrorist, market-oriented, and other globally-unaccountable forces are active in the international arena, states should remain as "the only institutions that

⁴¹ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*, New York, Macmillan, 2009, p. 3.

⁴² Michael Walzer, "Spheres of Affection", in Nussbaum, *For Love of Country*, p. 127.

⁴³ Benjamin R. Barber, "Constitutional Faith", in Nussbaum, *For Love of Country*, pp 30-1.

⁴⁴ Richard Falk, "Revisioning Cosmopolitanism", in Nussbaum, *For Love of Country*, pp. 56 and 60.

have legitimacy and power.”⁴⁵ Americans, in this respect, will continue taking pride in the US and sustaining their imagined national identity, as well as taking pride in their predestined place on earth. According to this viewpoint, the chaos and uncertainty of world politics renders cosmopolitanism to a category “too abstract to be a strong focus for the affections.”⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the extreme particularism of the post-September 11 era brought with it worldwide unpopularity and opposition to the US and has thus proven unsustainable. By 2008, the majority of Americans felt the urge to shift their moral allegiance towards, what Falk calls, “an ethos of inclusiveness”⁴⁷ and prepared themselves to embrace a wide diversity of political cultures and social viewpoints. The presidential elections of 2008 thus function as a turning point in this new inclination towards cosmopolitanism. Barack Obama has commonly been viewed as “America’s first cosmopolitan president” and is believed to share “the world’s scepticism” on America’s exceptionalism and particularism.⁴⁸ When France denied military aid to the US on the eve of the Iraqi occupation, the House of Representatives cafeteria renamed French fries as “freedom fries.”⁴⁹ Six years later, President Obama, indifferent to possible conservative reaction, publicly ordered a hamburger with Dijon mustard, instead of ketchup.⁵⁰ Traces of a cosmopolitan change could also be found on television. For example, the Fox TV series “24,” which depicts the extreme patriotism of the US and has been criticised for glorifying the ongoing witch-hunt against non-Americans, non-Christians and Middle Eastern people as potential terrorists, ended its last season rather unexpectedly. After having killed and tortured numerous people of different nationalities to “save the US,” Jack Bauer, the Counter Terrorist Unit agent, chooses a Muslim cleric to confide

⁴⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁶ Michael W. McConnell, “Don’t Neglect the Little Platoons”, in Nussbaum, *For Love of Country*, p. 81.

⁴⁷ Falk, “Revisioning Cosmopolitanism”, p. 58.

⁴⁸ Shattan, “Four Pillar of Obamaism”.

⁴⁹ “US Congress Opts for Freedom Fries”, 12 March 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2842493.stm>.

⁵⁰ Sonny Bunch, “Dijon: Spreading Appeal of an Elitist Condiment”, 13 May 2009, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/may/13/dijon-spreading-appeal-of-an-elitist-condiment/>.

in on his deathbed. Of course, what is of particular interest to this study is the cosmopolitan tone of Obama's presidential discourse from the perspective of the discussions of American Empire. The next section aims to further elaborate on this aspect of the topic.

As the Cosmopolitan Phase Unfolds

Drawing from Walter Russell Mead's classification of foreign policy schools, Deepak Lal offers us an overview of the Wilsonian, Jeffersonian, Jacksonian, and Hamiltonian schools.⁵¹ Throughout American history, these differing, and mostly contesting, foreign policy approaches have exerted considerable influences on world politics, repeatedly by taking turns and recurring and evolving in the hands of later presidents. Within this context, the Bush administration did not create a new imperial foreign policy, but rather borrowed from America's Jacksonian past, which glorified the fact that the US, though a pacific country, fought "a large number of what Rudyard Kipling called savage wars of peace."⁵² In this regard, the Obama presidency can be seen as the resurrection of the Wilsonian moralistic universalism and therefore not a foreign-policy novelty either. Obama reminds many Americans of their "progressive" president Wilson with his idealism, diplomacy and oratory skills.⁵³ Despite the high hopes invested in his presidency, Obama's more cautious audience, however, questions whether his moral idealism would escape the ill fate of the League of Nations.

In adapting the Wilsonian principle of shaping and abiding the international society, Obama prioritizes to improve America's relations with the world. The constantly deteriorating perceptions of the US within the European Union since September 11 would be an apt place to start. The gap between the US and EU foreign policies widened during the Bush administration, since the former was thought to be "prepared or even inclined to coerce other countries to obedience even in defiance of international institutions and law" and the latter was associated, though inefficiently, with "multilateralism" and "UN legitimacy." The EU, whose

⁵¹ Lal, *In Praise of Empire* pp. 56-60.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵³ Jonah Goldberg, "Obama's not New", *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 2008, www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-goldberg28-2008oct28,0,1793687.columnn.

concern is more on the failed states, especially in its neighbourhood, no longer has any intention of engaging with the ‘rogue’ states that the US points to.⁵⁴ Against this background, Obama has appreciated the pressing need to shift the American power politics from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’ and in the first few days of his presidency joined EU leaders at G-20 Summit in London, the NATO Summit in Strasbourg and Kehl, and the EU Summit in Prague. His globally-publicized visit to Turkey followed.

The US president’s Wilsonian quest for new diplomacy with first Europe and then the rest of the world, in the eyes of some political commentators, bears traces of “global meliorism” and “appeasement,” alongside “cosmopolitanism” and “soft power.”⁵⁵ Meliorism, which was introduced by the early twentieth-century political philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), stresses the human efforts of creating moral values and improving the status of humanity as the genuine motors of progress. Dewey inspired Wilson to become a leader who would change the course of world affairs by catalyzing international progress.⁵⁶ Now, spreading his notion of change and progress trans-Atlantically and beyond, Obama seems to have adapted a Wilsonian task of meliorism with a global outreach. Underprivileged groups all around the world already seem to expect an amelioration of their socio-economic and political conditions as well as in their citizenship status through Obama’s moral interference with the natural courses of their lives. Of course, whether this enormous expectation from the Obama will actually materialize, only time will tell.

As to ‘appeasement,’ another signature of Obamaian foreign policy, the presidential speeches delivered in foreign countries display a visible effort to reconcile the US with the world. Within this context, his speech to the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) serves as a significant example of appeasement. Under the Bush administration’s rather obscure Greater Middle East Project, Turkey was labelled as a ‘model’ country representing moderate Islam. Such an association undoubtedly offended modern Turkey’s secular ethos. After a decade of Washington’s insistence on Turkey as a moderate Islamic bastion in the Middle East, Obama praise of

⁵⁴ Zieolonka, *Europe as Empire*, p. 160.

⁵⁵ Shattan, “Four Pillar of Obamaism”.

⁵⁶ Goldberg, “Obama’s not New”.

Re-Entering the Cosmopolitan Phase of Imperium: Remarks on Obama's Presidency and Discussions of American Empire

Turkey's "strong and secular democracy"⁵⁷ at the TBMM on April 6, 2009, came as a surprise to many. Some prominent members of the Turkish political elite alienated by Bush politics have even acknowledged the beginning of a new era of cooperation and rapprochement with the US. Even though Obama has made some inevitable references to the Islamic faith of the majority of the Turkish people, he simultaneously displayed an undeniable appreciation for the "struggle and sacrifice" made in the name of secular democracy. The US president's oratory appeal - "[w]e seek broad engagement based upon mutual interests and mutual respect. We will listen carefully, bridge misunderstanding, and seek common ground. We will be respectful, even when we do not agree" — has soothed, though to a limited degree, the anti-American feelings prevailing in the Turkish public.⁵⁸

After having won some hearts and minds in secular Turkey, Obama chose Cairo University, Egypt as his main platform to appeal to the Muslim world. Considered "one of the most important trips of his fledgling presidency,"⁵⁹ Obama's Middle East trip and speech on June 04, 2009 drew extraordinary worldwide coverage. Cosmopolitan tones resonated in this speech: "We have a responsibility to join together on behalf of the world we seek" best demonstrates such discourse. Moreover, his reference to "Palestine" and not to the "future Palestinian state," sympathy with the Palestinians' "daily humiliations – large and small – that come with occupation," and denial of "the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements" have definitely marked a change of heart in Washington. It is also clear that change is underway in Iraq: as Obama stated, "[t]he fear and anger that [September 11] provoked was understandable, but in some cases it led us to act contrary to our traditions and our ideals...we are taking concrete actions to change course." Another important remark made by Obama, which is highly relevant to this study, concerns the US's association with 'coercive empire' during the Bush presidency. The Middle East seems to be the most

⁵⁷ "Remarks of President Barack Obama – As Prepared for Delivery Address to Turkish Parliament", 6 April 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/_06_04_09_obama_speech.pdf.

⁵⁸ "Remarks of President Barack Obama". The alleged Armenian genocide remains to be a source of tension between the US and Turkey.

⁵⁹ Stephen Clark, "With Speech in Egypt, Obama Calculates Risk of Alienating Israel, 02 June 2009, *Fox News*, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/06/02/obamas-outreach-muslim-world-carries-high-political-stakes/>.

appropriate geography to highlight the fact that “America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire.”⁶⁰ Even though the Republicans at home, such as former presidential candidate Mitt Romney, who consider going “around the world apologizing”⁶¹ to be inappropriate for the US president, Obama will most likely spend the next couple of years distancing himself from Bush’s foreign policy.

The rising cosmopolitanism in US domestic politics casts a parallel shadow on Obama’s foreign policy, which has been underpinned by what Joseph Shattan calls ‘soft power,’ ‘global meliorism,’ and ‘appeasement.’ One of the latest domestic-policy moves of the Obama administration – the nomination of a Latina judge, Sonia Sotomayor, to the Supreme Court – involves an inclusive, cosmopolitanism that aims to heal the inherent inequalities in American socio-economic and political stratification. This nomination, as Obama asserts, would honour the motto engraved on the front of the Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C.: “Equal justice under the law.”⁶² Borrowed from the ancient Athenian imperial ruler Pericles, the notion of “equal justice to all”⁶³ suggests that the ideal justice expands from the inside out, from the citizens of one state towards humanity. In that sense, the appointment of a Latina judge to the Supreme Court would have cosmopolitan implications, and contribute to the spread of justice across and beyond the borders of the US (especially in Central and South America). American recommitment to international law is expected to go hand-in-hand with groundbreaking reforms in domestic legal affairs. Obama’s reference to international law, when he condemned North Korea’s nuclear test on May 25, 2009 for “directly and recklessly challenging the international

⁶⁰ Jeff Zeleny, “Addressing Muslim World, Obama Calls for New Start”, 04 June 2009, *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/05/world/middleeast/05prexy.html?_r=1&hp.

⁶¹ “Romney Raps Obama’s Overseas Speechmaking”, 03 June 2009, Msnbc, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/31080317/>.

⁶² Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “A Trailblazer and a Dreamer”, *The New York Times*, 27 May 2009, Vol. CLVIII, No: 54688.

⁶³ Benjamin Jowett (trn.), Thucydides, *Pericles’s Funeral Oration*, London, Oxford University Press, 1892, p. 117.

Re-Entering the Cosmopolitan Phase of Imperium: Remarks on Obama's Presidency
and Discussions of American Empire

community,”⁶⁴ has been welcomed by columnists and scholars of jurisprudence.

As another cosmopolitan phase unfolds in the US history, one may surmise that the discussions of an American Empire will cease to permeate analyses of the US foreign policy. Nevertheless, cosmopolitanism, both Stoic and even Kantian, suggests a world order depending on the universal jurisdiction of international law, in other words an empire's order. As long as the threat of chaos persists on the international level and the international law's promise of order fails, an empire-like omnipotent entity in international relations is required. *The Law of Peoples* by the American political theorist John Rawls envisages a three-step mediation between the league of liberal, decent, and civilised states and the unpredictable group of “outlaw states and burdened societies.”⁶⁵ According to a group of scholars of international law, who draw from the arguments of the renowned Finnish diplomat Martti Koskenniemi, Rawls' theory of mediation, in effect, underpins the inevitability of an empire in international relations. In that sense, even when an overtly anti-empire intellectual such as Noam Chomsky urges the implementation of this theory in real politics, he somehow admits the imperativeness of a world order, not essentially different from what theorists of empire foresee.⁶⁶ Liberal or ‘civilised’ states have a responsibility to promote the universal values and establish a legal order that would give them a “corresponding special power.” This stoic responsibility towards the rest of the world “would necessarily lead to an expansion of a liberal Empire, or Empire's law.”⁶⁷ In the twenty-first century, the US seems to be replacing Exceptionalism with a commitment to international law, thus rendering it the ideal candidate to be such an empire.

⁶⁴ David Alexander, “Obama Says North Korea Nuclear Test a ‘Grave Concern’”, 25 May 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSTRE54O14220090525?feedType=RSS&feedName=politicsNews&sp=true>.

⁶⁵ John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples: With “The Idea of Public Revisited”*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 89-120.

⁶⁶ Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*, New York, Metropolitan Books, 2006, p. 39.

⁶⁷ Roland Pierik and Wouter Werner, “Cosmopolitanism, Global Justice and International Law”, *Leiden Journal of International Law*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (December 2005), p. 681.

On 22 January 2009, Obama signed an executive order “to close the Guantanamo Bay prison, to eliminate secret CIA prisons, and to bring the CIA under the limits of the Army’s Filed Manual on Human Intelligence Collector Operations (FM 2-22.3).” By doing so, he overturned Bush’s Military Order “Detention, Treatment, and Trial of Certain Non-Citizens in the War Against Terrorism.” Obama’s action, only two days after his inauguration, has been welcomed by the jurists as a move honouring the rule of law – something that was clearly lacking during the Bush administration.⁶⁸ Having begun the process of disassociating itself from the label ‘coercive empire,’ the US now displays the characteristics of a cosmopolitan empire fit to provide global ‘law and order,’ which are the basic requirements for ‘human thriving.’ An empire with a cosmopolitan agenda would not, as an oversimplified and not necessarily accurate definition of empire holds, seek to empower simply on ‘territorial expansion’ or ‘predatory motive of booty.’ Lal expects that “[w]ith the growth of a cosmopolitan class (culturally and often personally linked) of primarily US-trained technicians and executives at work in many different countries,” Washington will be able to undertake a new venture of *imperium*. The existence of a stoic “political and economic elite – open to the talents of all” and freed from the constraints of the race could help end the chaotic international system.⁶⁹ Thus, the election of an African-American president coincides very nicely with the overhaul of the US Foreign Service.

Conclusion

Subsequent to the end of the Bush presidency, therefore, the discussions of an American Empire have only transformed and been likely to continue from the perspective of cosmopolitanism. As US foreign and domestic-policy rhetoric approaches, with baby steps, Nussbaum’s formulation in the wake of September 11, the international community seems to be responding to the new cosmopolitan tone of the US presidential discourse, especially its attempts to facilitate global order, peace, and prosperity – even though it implies the existence of a US empire. As long as the rephrasing and reinvigorating the American foreign-policy statements go,

⁶⁸ Mary Ellen O’Connel, “President Obama: New Hope for International Law?,” 26 January 2009, *Jurist: Legal News and Research*, <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/forumy/2009/01/president-obama-new-hope-for.php>.

⁶⁹ Lal, *In Praise of Empires*, pp. xxiii, 67 and 74.

the harm done to US's external perceptions by the Bush administration is in the process of being reversed. Nevertheless, words do not always back up the actions. Similarly, as the problematic inherent in the adaptations of empire, theory and practice do not coincide.

Whatever theory the empire-aspirers adapt, there will always be insurmountable problems hindering the ideal implementation of their imperial theory. Obama, for instance, just one day after he signed the executive order closing the Guantanamo Detention Facilities, approved the CIA's usage of "an unmanned predator drone to attack Pakistan, openly violating international law."⁷⁰ As the written and visual media, Internet press, and blogs attest, Americans are expressing some doubt over Obama's decisiveness to "redirect the American imagination" from the 'coercive empire' to 'cosmopolitan empire.'⁷¹ Obama's open-ended guarantee during his election campaign – that his "number one job as president will be to keep the American people safe" and that he "will not hesitate to act against those that would do America harm" – has cast a shadow over Obama's commonly-praised rhetorical commitment to the international community.⁷² In the eyes of many, both in and out of the US, the presidency of Obama, at its very outset, signifies a clear break from the foreign-policy implementations that have previously convinced the world public of the existence of a coercive American empire. To be able to talk about the change in the perceptions of the US as empire, however, the new Presidency's dealings with the Middle East, Central Asia, global economic crisis and climate change should first unfold in their entirety.

In the face of the threat of chaos posed by Afghanistan in particular, Obama may also resort to the legacy of a strong presidency or inherent power. Some fervent discussants of political blogs on the internet do not hide their cynicism about Obama's promise. To them, "change", the presidential campaign's predominant slogan, might consist of putting an end to the "unnecessary and staggeringly costly war in Iraq," but might also justify the

⁷⁰ O'Connell, "New Hope for International Law".

⁷¹ Brian Walsh, "Barack Obama: A Post-Imperial Presidency", 05 November 2008, <http://empireremixed.com/2008/11/05/barack-obama-a-post-imperial-presidency>.

⁷² 21 February 2008, The Democratic Presidential Debate at the University of Texas in Austin.

“necessary war in Afghanistan.”⁷³ Bush’s strong presidency dismantled “the array of alliance relationships” that the US had built and maintained throughout the Cold War and its aftermath. As its traditional alliances dissolved, the US had to seek “excessive self-reliance,” exhausting its vast resources.⁷⁴ In a rare moment when the theories and practices of empire converge, they would reveal that the excessive self-reliance is simply not sustainable. In order to prevent the exhaustion of America’s resources once again, Obama needs to attend to the “question of burden-sharing and leadership,”⁷⁵ especially with the EU. His first appeal to Europe at the NATO Summit on 3-4 April 2009 did not bear the desired outcomes, as Germany did not approve sending substantial forces to Afghanistan.

Instead of burden-sharing, what should be considered is the universality of values that an empire-like entity could promote as “world order.” While such universal values have been historically problematic due to their association with the implementation of Anglo-American ideology in developing nations (thus reifying colonial discourses), they could serve as an initial step towards negotiating with rogue, failed, and failing states such as Afghanistan. Even though under such a configuration the US would revive itself as the “cosmopolitan empire” dreamed of by Marcus Aurelius, “the provisional and parochial versions of universality currently encoded in international law” could counter-balance the perpetuation of this global order. Therefore, universal values must first be unburdened from their western baggage. As Judith Butler argued in her response to Nussbaum, the stoic prescription of universality “has not yet arrived,” and “we have no ready concept” for it.⁷⁶ Thus, the empire of the twenty-first century should challenge existing definitions of “the universal,” with the goal of arriving at universal peace and order.

⁷³ Patrick Martin, “The New York Times’ Endorsement of Obama”, 25 October 2008. <http://wsws.org/articles/2008/oct2008/obny-o25.shtml>.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, “Alliance and American National Security”, October 2006 Strategic Studies Institute Report, 01 November 2006, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?PubID=730>.

⁷⁵ Zielonka, *Europe as Empire*, p. 160.

⁷⁶ Judith Butler, “Universality in Culture”, in Nussbaum, *For Love of Country*, pp. 47 and 49.