

Vanishing Wonders of the Empire

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The academia and media in the metropolis of the world system are increasingly focusing on the reality the lonely superpower is facing in its body-politic, within its society, in the economy it operates and in geopolitics. The opinion is getting loud : decline of the empire has set in.

Colin Powell, a former military leader and former US secretary of state said at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa : "The American soul has always harbored a deep desire to help people build better lives for themselves and their children. We have always understood that our own well-being depends on the well-being of our fellow inhabitants of this planet Earth." But, like an irony, that "deep desire" is failing to find friends around the globe. In regions the United States is finding itself increasingly isolated. Latin America is an example. In home, the days with latent discontent are not happy ones.

Charles Kupchan, professor of international affairs at Georgetown University and senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations commented in *The Washington Post* in its April 3, 2005 issue : "A common theme unites several new books : eroded America's international standing... left the country dangerously isolated." The books are : Kishore Madhubani's *Beyond the Age of Innocence : Rebuilding Trust Between America and the World* (Public Affairs), Alan Wolfe's *Return to Greatness : How America Lost Its Sense of Purpose and What It Needs to Do to Recover It* (Princeton Univ.), Nancy Soderberg's *The Superpower Myth : The Use and Misuse of American Might* (Wiley) and David Rieff's *At the Point of a Gun : Democratic Dreams and Armed Intervention* (Simon & Schuster). Madhubani writes : Average Americans are "blithely ignorant" of how profoundly such choices affect others leading to a country that makes much of the globe feel disenfranchised and resentful. Nancy urged "the United States to find the right balance between isolationism and global dominion..." Fareed Zakaria, editor, *Newsweek*, writes in his *The Post-American World* (W W Norton and Co., 2008) : "At the politico-military level, we remain in a single-superpower world. The world will not stay unipolar for decades and then suddenly, one afternoon, become multipolar. On every dimension other than military power—industrial, financial, social, cultural—the distribution of power is shifting, moving away from US dominance. But we are moving into a post-American world, one defined and directed from many places and by many people". Roger C Altman, former US deputy treasury secretary (in 1993-94) wrote in *Foreign Affairs* (Jan./Feb. 2009) : "[T]he United States' global power, as well as the appeal of US-style democracy, is eroding." William Engdahl, the German author and economist said in May, 2009 : "We are also looking at the end of the American century." Martin Jacques, senior visiting research fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, wrote in *The Guardian* (March 28, 2006): the process of the decline of the US as a global power has already started. "The Bush administration stands guilty of an extraordinary act of imperial overreach which has left the US more internationally isolated than ever before, seriously stretched financially ... Iraq was supposed to signal the US's new global might: in fact, it

may well prove to be a harbinger of its decline.” There are also voices outside the mainstream. Their opinions and observations are emphatic and specific. Gabriel Kolko, author of *The Age of War* (March, 2006), wrote: “The world is escaping the US.” Analyses and opinions convey similar messages: The world is witnessing the decline of the US, the most powerful empire since the Roman Empire.

The United States stood unrivaled on the world stage, with the fall of the USSR, for the last two decades. Since the end of the Cold War the world with a few exceptions followed diktats from the US. The oligopoly in the US reaped the dividend of the World War II and of the Cold War. It then tried to do the same from the War on Terror, an adventure growing out of military-Keynesianism in the US economy, an effort to impose an world order designed by neo-cons in the Washington DC, a tactical initiative to increase military presence in areas considered strategic in the context of the peak oil situation, a striving to widen fold by winning over or coercing allies.

History is replete with similar moments in empires. The "war on terrorism", according to Chossudovsky, is a war of conquest. Only the military expenditure will tell it. Citing information from The Center for Defense Information, "World Military Expenditures"; "Deployment Information," Dr Chip Gagnon, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Politics, Ithaca College, said: “US military spending in 2000 was more than combined spending of next 25 countries; US spending represented 36 percent of all military spending globally; In the words of the Dept. of Defense, ‘The US military is currently deployed to more locations than it has been throughout history’; 226 countries have US military bases and /or US troops on their soil. Only 46 countries have no US military presence.” On the basis of the National Income and Product Accounts (OMB) Foster, Holleman and McChesney calculated that the actual US military spending in 2007 came to \$1 trillion. The military might, however, does not reflect the vitality of any empire. It, on the contrary, exhibits a globe slipping out of the grip of the world power. The forces of decay are active, evident in incidents and processes handed down by history, in its spheres and structures. These spheres and structures include the politico-ideological leadership, geopolitics, society, politics and economy encompassed by and manifested in values and culture which have grown out of economy.

All ruling systems including empires impose own ideology based on interests of the dominating class in the respected society and these ideologies lose appeal and momentum, in a slow process, before the machines of rule rust and goes into oblivion. Loss of ideological dominance and leadership is a symptom of decline. The present empire is losing that ground. Neither the neo-cons nor the neo-liberals possess that appeal now throughout the world. Gone are the days of the Iron Lady and the Great Communicator. The Empire with its ideology is not showing the path to progress, neither in the area of peace nor in the area of justice, neither in the area of distribution of wealth nor in the area of resource uses, neither in the area of management nor in the area of efficiency.

Dominance of an ideology is forfeited by the forces of contradiction embedded in the production system as its acceptability is eroded, as its validity and rationale are questioned, as it fails to bring welfare to the vast majority upon whom the ideology is imposed and whose unreluctance the political system needs. All empires with all their might strive hard, maintain retinue of ideologues, built up

formal and informal institutions, spend large amounts of money, try to show benevolence to impose their ideology, to imbibe the ruled with their ideology for consolidating and safeguarding regimen. All rulers, brute kings and brutal emperors, merciless mercenaries and shameless underlings spend energy to this end only to be appropriated by history. They all try to get acceptance by their subjects. But all their efforts stand hapless victim once these lose ground in the psyche of their subjects, once the ideological hollowness is exposed by ruthless reality, once the ruling screed turn laughingstock to the subjects, once the process of decline spreads its wings of decadence over the palaces of power.

The present empire is experiencing the same historical process. Its calls for democracy and peace, its calls for fighting injustice and inequality, its calls for fighting despots and corruption turn hollow promises as people the world over find no grain of truth in the propaganda against weapons of mass destruction, as the people come to know CEOs' skimming, false ratings by companies entrusted with the job, facilitation of fatal speculation under the name of deregulation, widening income gap in the name of market liberalism. The myth of market has been blown out by the system itself, not by any competing class of the rulers. Roger Altman wrote: This damage has put the American model of free-market capitalism under a cloud. The financial system is seen as having collapsed; and the regulatory framework, as having spectacularly failed to curb widespread abuses and corruption. Now, searching for stability, the US government and some European governments have nationalized their financial sectors to a degree that contradicts the tenets of modern capitalism. "[A]nother ideology has failed", said Mark Blyth, professor of international political economy at Brown University and author of *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Political Change in the Twentieth Century*. "The belief that markets are uniquely good and self-regulating entities, while states are always and everywhere bad and overregulating monstrosities, is a recurring nightmare in the history of capitalism", he wrote. Francis Fukuyama's new book *After the Neocons* mercilessly criticizes Bush's foreign policy and the school of thought that lay behind it. The all promising neo-liberalism, free market, smallest possible role of state, structural adjustment programmes, free trade and free-wheeling profit, the promises of imposing democracies and to uphold human rights have gone lost by the failure of market economy, by the bursting of asset bubble, by the speculation with "exotic" financial instruments with names like CDOs, CMOs, hedge funds, by the non-democratic decision making process in the Bretton Woods institutions, by the leaking out of the news of interrogation method. Now, the model does not appeal the people. The trustworthiness of the promises has been lost and the promises appear propaganda. Now, to many it appears fascism as Gerald Celente, founder of the Trends Research Institute and publisher of *Trends Journal* told in an interview in April, 2009: the merger of corporate and government power in modern America is plain and simple fascism.

US corporations' role and acts around the world including Bechtel's involvement, as was told by William Finnegan in *The New Yorker* (April 8, 2002), in the forcible privatization of water systems in Bolivia, Enron's bullying tactics against governments in India, Croatia, and many other countries, US involvement in politics in countries around the globe have created an image of

the US: "The other view is of the United States," Edward Said told in an interview in *The Progressive* (Nov., 2001), "the United States of armies and interventions." Chomsky had the similar view: people in the rest of the world "like Americans and admire much about the US, including its freedoms. What they hate is official policies that deny them the freedoms to which they too aspire." (*The Guardian*, September 9, 2002). Reagan's support to Saddam in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war, col. North's "heroic" Irancontra fiasco, Halliburton's support to Saddam in the '90s, and Bush's negotiations with the Taliban in 2001 have eroded credibility of US propaganda. The Saddam's WMD story spread by the neo-cons at the helm of the state stands as a show of playing with lies by a powerful politico-propaganda machine. Hamilton Fish Armstrong, former editor of *Foreign Affairs*, wrote decades ago: "The methods we have used in fighting the [Vietnam] war have scandalized and disgusted public opinion in almost all foreign countries. Not since we withdrew into comfortable isolation in 1920 has the prestige of the US stood so low." There were many polls covering many countries throughout the later parts of the last century and at the beginning of the present millennium and the overwhelming results of those reflected people disgust and hatred to, and mistrust upon the US. The business and political scandals in the pre- and post-Enron periods have increased these mistrusts, etc. Most of the allies and proxies the US chose over the decades, Shah, Marcos, Duvelier, Noriega, Pinochet, Suharto, to name a few, were corrupt and venal, and lost acceptability in respective countries and those friends of the US in turn weakened US standing among the citizens of those countries.

The world now understands the US history more than any time in the past. The world now knows that many of the policies and legislations the US ruling elites followed over the past centuries and are following now including the Homestead Act, signed by president Abraham Lincoln in 1862 and the "bail out" measures being taken now would have been termed "socialist" by the US establishment and the corporate media had those were followed by other countries. This has done nothing but has put another stroke on the mask named hypocrisy and has undermined the moral standing of the state. A Pew Research Center survey found US' approval ratings plummeted throughout the world between 2000 and 2006. Majorities in 33 of the 47 countries surveyed by Pew expressed dislike for the American ideas of democracy. John Edwards, a former senator from North Carolina, also cited this survey finding (*Foreign Affairs*, Sept./Oct., 2007). The voidance in the Empire's ideology and political standing is exposed not only among the people around the world, at home also.

One of the ideological cornerstones of the Empire was the capitalist system that has generated inequality and dominance of profit based interests. So, writes John Kozy, professor of philosophy and logic, "the broken healthcare system can't be rebuilt fundamentally, it can only be patched. Failed foreign policy practices cannot be altered fundamentally, they can only be patched. The political system that allows deep-pocketed lobbyists to corrupt the system cannot be reformed, it can only be patched. And most importantly, the capitalist economic system, capitalisme sauvage, cannot be transformed, it can only be patched. The more things are patched, the more things stay the same. What passes for a society continually unravels, no social problems are ever solved, the people are

abandoned for the sake of institutions founded on erroneous beliefs, and eventually the nation collapses.” He continues: “There is empirical evidence for this view—all the promises politicians have made to get elected that have never been fulfilled.” ‘Time’ made similar comments during the US Congress voting on the bail-out plan : “Washington went to the well once more. But the well of trust had long run dry. [Washington’s] own credibility crisis might take longer to repair.” Fareed Zakaria, one of the voices of the mainstream opines: “The United States has serious problems. By all calculations, Medicare threatens to blow up the federal budget. The swing from surpluses to deficits between 2000 and 2008 has serious implications. Growing inequality ... has become a signature feature of the new era.” And, Obama’s healthcare proposal was termed “socialism” by Michael Steele, chairman of the Republican Party, as an AP report told in the last days of July, 2009. An exhibition of ideological confusion among the ruling elites indeed! Gerald Horne, contributing editor, *Political Affairs* found “The declining prestige of Washington” in the rebukes of the human rights watchdog of the United Nations for US violations of international law at home and abroad. What really captured attention were, he wrote, “the sharp criticisms of US domestic policy, Washington’s draconian asylum and immigration policies, the promiscuous deployment of the death penalty and life imprisonment and police brutality, were all condemned in no uncertain terms.” An ideology with all its hollowness produces these pictures of reality.

Imposition of the US designed democracy, as part of its capital driven strategic goals with coat of ideology, in the countries in the Second or near to Third, Third, and Fourth Worlds is one of the politico-ideological tools used by Washington. But, it is not working. The Caribbean Basin Initiative with huge fund and the Contra, the vigilantes and military aid could not halt the emergence of Chavez, Lula, Evo, Ortega and many others. They signify the failure of the US designed democracy now being questioned by many, even from the mainstream. About three years ago, Republican Congressman Henry Hyde argued on US export of democracy around the world as deeply misguided and potentially dangerous: "A broad and energetic promotion of democracy in other countries that will not enjoy our long-term and guiding presence may equate not to peace and stability but to revolution ... There is no evidence that we or anyone can guide from afar revolutions we have set in motion. We can more easily destabilize friends and others and give life to chaos and to avowed enemies than ensure outcomes in service of our interests and security." He concluded: "A few brief years ago, history was proclaimed to be at an end, our victory engraved in unyielding stone, our pre-eminence garlanded with permanence. But we must remember that Britain's majestic rule vanished in a few short years, undermined by unforeseen catastrophic events and by new threats that eventually overwhelmed the palisades of the past".

Strategic failures boldly dot the map of the Empire. There are failures in the spheres of military doctrine, in geostrategy and in the financial system. One of the keystones of the US military doctrine was: Europe and its control would determine the future of world power. But the US had to fight in Korea and Vietnam, and is now fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Should not Pakistan be mentioned? There were smaller, in terms of size of military involvement,

engagements in Cambodia, Grenada, Haiti, Panama, and Somalia. The bombings in former Yugoslavia have not ensured peace in that shattered land. The stakes of power in these theatres of war / interventions were not smaller and all of these involvements have not ensured the US dominance in those regions. There was no scope to use the NATO arsenal in a few of these conflicts. Now, the Warsaw Pact has disappeared. But, NATO still has to keep itself busy in Europe with its military exercise. Despite initiatives to expand NATO there is a process of breaking up of the alliance and going the way of SEATO, CENTO, etc. The 1999 war against Serbia made its demise much more likely and the US-led alliance disagreed profoundly over the Iraq War.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a big setback for the US. As one of the reasons behind its formations Prof. Michael Hudson says: "When the US payments deficit pumps dollars into foreign economies, these banks are being given little option except to buy US Treasury bills and bonds which the Treasury spends on financing an enormous, hostile military build-up to encircle the major dollar-recyclers: China, Japan and Arab OPEC oil producers. Yet these governments are forced to recycle dollar inflows in a way that funds US military policies in which they have no say in formulating, and which threaten them more and more belligerently. That is why China and Russia took the lead in forming the SCO a few years ago." The SCO have other geostrategic considerations also. Geopolitical observers are assuming that some more European countries will join the SCO. The critical energy alliance Russia and China have formed in Central Asia, in the Caucasus, in Africa and even in South America are challenges to the US. The dollar's viability is being questioned not only by Russia and China. Other countries are also there. In 2006, the United Arab Emirates announced that it has moved 10% of its \$29 billion in foreign exchange reserves into euros. In the same year, China and Japan developed an "unusual consensus" in support of an Asian currency unit, as the *Financial Times* told, "to reduce their reliance on a weaker dollar." This consensus is significant though the ACU has a long way to go.

The failures are increasing and allies are not always responding positively. The Iraq War has accelerated the process which is going on. Prof. James Petras in *Global Research* (May 21, 2009) summarized recent US major failures in the international arena : Washington's attempt to push for a joint economic stimulus program among the 20 biggest economies at the G-20 meeting in April 2009; (2) Calls for a major military commitment from NATO to increase the number of combat troops in conflict zones in Afghanistan and Pakistan to complement the additional 21,000 US troop buildup (*Financial Times*, April 12, 2009); and 3) Plans to forge closer political and diplomatic relations among the countries of the Americas based on the pursuit of a common agenda, including the continued exclusion of Cuba and isolation of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador (*La Jornada*, April 20, 2009). The most striking indicator of the United States' declining economic presence and political influence in Latin America, according to Petras, is found in the trade figures of Brazil, Latin America's biggest and most industrialized country. In April 2009, total trade between Brazil and China amounted to \$3.2 billion dollars, while its trade with the US was \$2.8 billion (*Telegraph*, May 10, 2009). This was the second straight month that China

surpassed the US as Brazil's biggest trading partner, ending 80 years of US primacy. Just as the US pours hundreds of billions of dollars into military-driven empire building, China is steadily pursuing its overseas economic empire via billion dollar trade and joint investment agreements with Brazil in oil, gas, iron ore, soya and cellulose. China has already displaced the US as Chile's primary trading partner, and is increasing its share of trade with Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina – and even with staunchly US clients, like Colombia, Peru and Mexico. The re-vitalization of the IMF via an injection of \$750 billion dollars was not welcomed by the 'emerging market' countries because of the IMF's harsh conditions. The NATO summit spurned Washington's demands for more combat troops to Afghanistan. The Summit of the Americas was a fiasco for Washington. It was completely isolated in its defense of US policy toward Cuba, the Cuban Embargo and its designation of Cuba as a "state supporter of terrorism". At the same time, the Latin American countries turned elsewhere – to Iran and China, as well as within the region, for opportunities to stimulate their economies.

Gradual loosening of the grip of the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary is now a stark fact in Latin America. The initiative to isolate Cuba by the US is now coming back as a boomerang. The US now increasingly finds it there in an isolated position. Mercosur, the regional trade agreement instituted to promote free trade throughout South America (similar to NAFTA), is gaining supporters and seeks to give Latin America the same economic clout that the US and EU have. There are ALBA, the Bolivarian alternative, and the Bank of the South under the leadership of Venezuela also, which seek to provide viable alternatives to the hegemony of the Empire.

Political equation in Nepal compelled the US to withdraw support from Gyanendra, the ousted king, that helped Prachanda led Nepali Maoists to put the master stroke on the Nepali political scene. The emergence of the Maoists in the Nepali political arena as a dominating force has far-reaching geopolitical and ideological implications.

Altman in the above mentioned essay said : "The financial and economic crash of 2008 ... is a major geopolitical setback for the United States and Europe. Over the medium term, Washington and European governments will have neither the resources nor the economic credibility to play the role in global affairs that they otherwise would have played. These weaknesses will eventually be repaired, but in the interim, they will accelerate trends that are shifting the world's center of gravity away from the United States." Titled "The Great Crash, 2008, A Geopolitical Setback for the West" he said in the essay: "Indeed, rising economic powers are gaining new influence. No country will benefit economically from the financial crisis over the coming year, but a few states—most notably China—will achieve a stronger relative global position". Quoting the US National Intelligence Council's Global Trend 2025 report news agencies said: US economic and political power is set to decline over the next two decades and the world will grow more dangerous as the battle for scarce resources intensifies. One of the main conclusions of the report is: "the unipolar world is over, [or] certainly will be by 2025", said Thomas Fingar, the NIC's deputy director, at a press conference in Washington DC.

As there is unity of the opposites in the material world the sole superpower could not impose tranquility in all the lands torn with strife and conflicts generated by the competition for accumulation. It had to rely on the UN as, John Hughes, former editor, *The Christian Science Monitor* and former UN assistant secretary-general (1995) wrote in the Monitor: UN peacekeeping is also relatively cheap that costs less worldwide in a year than the combined budgets of the New York City fire and police departments ...” It demonstrates the limits of the global power: in terms of mobilization, fund, and, most important, imposing consensus on all the contending parties, either the front organizations or the underlying interests, MNCs, states, unfulfilled aspirations of nationalities, tribes, all the stakeholders. A stark reality of limitation the collapsed Kremlin Empire had not experienced during its mid-day, but had to wrestle with by all the empires during their days of decadence. □□□