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Robert J. Lieber, *The American Era: Power and Strategy for the 21st Century*, with new postscript, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 293 pp., $18.99 pbk, ISBN: 978-0-521-69738-5, $30.00 hbk, ISBN: 978-0-521-85737-6
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First published in 2005, *The American Era* offers, in this edition, a new postscript by the author analyzing policy after Iraq. Lieber's thesis is simple if unfashionable: the Bush doctrine (including the Iraq war), on balance, is an appropriate response to the enemy as revealed on 9/11. As such, it is unlikely to be abandoned any time soon, whether a Republican or a Democrat takes office in January 2009. Thus, he argues, the gloomy assessments of Bush and the hopeful predictions made for his successor by realists and, especially, liberal internationalists (and he takes on both) are wrong.

Realists, as Lieber argued in 2005 and rejoins in his new 2007 postscript (see especially pp. 206–9), have made predictions of US decline that have not come to pass. As he observes, 'there is considerable evidence that balancing is not really taking place' (p. 200). The predicted rise and coalescence of Russian and Chinese power has not happened. Indeed, China remains more concerned about Japan than the US (pp. 223–4) and is thus prepared to accept America as Asia's 'pacifier' (the subject of Chapter 6). American 'disengagement', Lieber predicts, 'would probably lead to more dangerous competition or power-balancing' in the region. The European Union is hardly more coherent in its foreign policy as a result of its qualms over the Bush Doctrine (see Chapter 3); the EU and US have, Lieber tells us, actually 'moved closer together rather than farther apart (p. 222) . . . divorce is not on the horizon' (p. 94). Anti-Americanism in the Muslim (especially Arab) world has arguably increased – as the author explores with refreshing analytical detachment (Chapter 7) – but 9/11 itself was plotted and planned in the 1990s, a decade in which America waged at least three wars to liberate Muslims from external aggression (in Kuwait, Bosnia, and Kosovo). Islamist rage ebbs and flows irrespective of what America actually does. For this reason, Lieber remains sceptical of the claims made by Joseph S. Nye on the behalf of American 'soft power' (p. 33).

Lieber is not unsympathetic to realism, but international relations since 9/11 are not fertile territory for the paradigm. States have not responded to American primacy as realists continue to predict (see the work of Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer). Similarly, the enemy is annoyingly non- or sub-state, leaving realists with little to say about its behaviour beyond the line that America

has overreacted to it. The realist designation of Saddam Hussein as a value-maximizing rational actor was, as Lieber illustrates (pp. 207–8), more hopeful than real. The rational credentials of Iran's President Ahmadinejad are likewise prone to realist exaggeration (p. 209).

Liberal internationalists have similarly failed to grasp the altered international landscape (see pp. 32–6 and 209–13). Instead, argues Lieber, liberals critique a caricature of Bush foreign policy, rather than its record. For example, the supposed decent into aggressive unilateralism after 9/11 – an illusion, writes Lieber, perpetuated by, among others, John Ikenberry (p. 33) – was really nothing of the kind. In his handling of Pyongyang and Tehran, for example, Bush arguably out-multilateralized Bill Clinton. He certainly avoided repetition of his predecessor's 1994 'Cuban Missile Crisis' over North Korea. As Lieber reminds us, the National Security Strategy of 2002 was hardly a repudiation of coalition building and 'the administration was at pains to attract as much support as possible' for its invasion of Iraq (p. 210).

Lieber's main problem with the liberal approach is its hopeful assertion that some kind of international institution or multilateral coalition can replace US primacy. Even if such an entity could be brought into being, why would we want it to?, asks the author. The 'most urgent and lethal dangers' facing the world, from terrorism and WMD proliferation to genocide and state failure, require 'the use of state power and of military force by the United States or by other countries that have the ability to act' (pp. 80–1). Efficacy is a function of state power and will, argues Lieber, not liberal fantasizing. He offers the example of Bosnia. From 1991 to 1995 almost every conceivable tool of liberal institutionalism was deployed to end the three-sided war. The blanket UN arms embargo robbed the Bosnia Muslims of their right to self-defense. Dutch UN peacekeepers stood by at the 1995 Srebrenica massacre. The EU was tragically ineffective at resolving a conflict in its own backyard. 'Only after three years and 200,000 dead did the United States finally take the lead in ending the killing' (p. 81).

The author is more Truman Democrat than neoconservative, though the labels are not mutually exclusive. Lieber sees in contemporary US grand strategy both historical antecedents – a global campaign – and important and necessary adaptations – given the nature of the enemy and the unique primacy America enjoys. *The America Era* is better described as non-ideological and the author borrows freely from a range of sources. As well as a coherent argument, the book offers an excellent overview of current scholarship. Chapter 1 is a seminal, if too brief, discussion of the existing literature on American power.

Some illuminating epigraphs open the book's seven chapters – 'The US has rabies', said by John Paul Sartre in 1953, opens Lieber's assessment of anti-Americanism (Chapter 7); Salman Rushdie's indictment of a misplaced Muslim grievance against America opens consideration of globalization (Chapter 4). The writing is refreshingly free of jargon – a fault of much of the literature written in opposition to Lieber's thesis. His case is argued to strong, non-partisan effect. His examples are telling. The overall impact is to restructure the debate over recent American foreign policy along lines that are calm, analytical, and scholarly. We can only hope other books, whatever their normative agenda, will follow this example.

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