

## **UNCLE SAM: IMPERIAL BULLY OR HEGEMON BOSS? A CONCEPTUAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN AMERICAN EMPIRE AND HEGEMONY**

**Albert Schoeman<sup>1</sup>**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Over the last few years, and especially since the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 in the United States, an intense and controversial new debate is raging within the context of the globalised world. In the aftermath of these attacks, George W Bush launched a crusade against terrorism aptly christened the 'War on Terror'. American attacks on Afghanistan (with wide-ranging support from both the Western and non-Western world) and especially the war in Iraq (with far less support) have stimulated and given new urgency to the debate about 'American imperialism.' Interestingly, long before the current debate, it only used to be foreigners and those on the fringes of US politics who referred to an 'American Empire'. The latter term was often used to criticize the emerging 'single super-power' status the United States acquired after the end of the Cold War (Ferguson 2003b:64). Especially countries in the developing world, anti-globalization movements and Arab states are viewing the current dominant position of the United States very negatively and with suspicion. For many years most African states have experienced the yoke of European imperialism and the fear of an all-powerful America with the ability to dominate them again contributes to this suspicion. For many observers the way in which the authority of the United Nations (regarding the attack on Iraq) was undermined by the United States strongly suggests that it possesses characteristics of an empire in the classical Roman or British tradition. Schroeder (2004:1) emphasizes the relevance of the debate when he argues that "American Empire is the current rage - whether hailed or denounced, accepted as inevitable or greeted as an historic opportunity. Common to the discourse is an assumption, shared also by friends and foes abroad, that America already enjoys a world-imperial position and is launched on an imperial course." In the light of this Michael Walzer (2003:27) ponders the question whether Washington can now be

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Political Science, University of the Free State (Qwaqwa Campus). E-mail: schoemanpa@qwa.uovs.ac.za. Paper prepared for presentation to the Annual Conference of Research Committee 49 of the International Political Science Association, University of Oxford, 2 July 2004.

regarded as the new Rome, or whether an American empire really exists? Also, can the war in Iraq be regarded as an imperialist war? Most government officials in America clearly do not think so. On the contrary, whereas the British were quite open about the fact that they were running an empire, few American politicians would use the 'e' word as anything other than a term of abuse. For instance, Sandy Berger, the national security adviser in the Clinton administration, declared in 1999 that "the United States is the 'first global power in history that is not an imperial power'" (Ferguson 2003a:154). During his presidential election campaign in 2000, US President George W Bush echoed these sentiments when he declared that "America has never been an Empire. We may be the only great power in history that had the chance, and refused - preferring greatness to power, and justice to glory" (Ferguson 2003b:64). During another speech on the first of May 2003, Bush further insisted that "other nations in history have fought in foreign lands and remained to occupy and exploit. Americans, following a battle, want nothing more than to return home." According to Simes (2003:91), these sentiments become understandable in the light of the fact that many past empires were given a bad name not just by their opponents (liberation movements to Marxists) but also because of their conducts. With regard to the latter, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union are viewed as the ugliest manifestations.

The debate is, however, confused by the fact that many observers also describe the current overpowering position of the United States in world affairs as hegemonial rather than as imperial. Due to the possible 'political incorrectness', or even the apparent negative 'stigma' attached to the term, American government officials are very reluctant to describe their country's current international position as an empire and rather refer to it as 'hegemony', 'uni-polarity' or even 'leadership'. In an article entitled "Getting hegemony right" G John Ikenberry (2001:17-24), for instance, identifies the current all-powerful position of the United States as a hegemony, rather than an empire. The terms empire and hegemony are also often used interchangeably as if they are synonyms. This point is, for instance, illustrated by Roy (2004:34) who argues that "for the first time in history, a single **empire** with an arsenal of weapons that could obliterate the world in an afternoon has complete, unipolar, economic and military **hegemony**". Is an empire in his words, therefore, just part of a larger hegemony? In another contribution Jervis (2003:83) refers to "the establishment of U.S. **hegemony**, primacy, or **empire**...", highlighting the fact that the two terms are used as synonyms. The dilemma is further emphasized when Haque (2003:451) argues that "in short, the concept of nationalism and imperialism are related - beyond the purpose of national liberation, nationalism can be used for legitimizing the **imperialistic** mission of international **hegemony**". The following discussion will aim to formulate a clearer conceptual distinction between hegemony and empire. Possible similarities and differences will be identified to determine

whether the current powerful political and economic position of the United States in world affairs shows characteristics of an empire or hegemony. Thereafter, focus will be placed on the arguments of the supporters of the view that America is a hegemony. Attention will also be paid to the views of 'American empire' supporters. The study will not attempt to make a detailed philosophical analysis of the differences between empire and hegemony but will rather aim to provide a broad overview.

## **2. IS AN EMPIRE A HEGEMONY, IS IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND OR ARE THEY JUST PLAIN DIFFERENT?**

The history of the Nation State has always been characterized by a deep-seated fear by the weak of being dominated by the strong. Many states and peoples had to bear the burden of being subjects under the rule and control of an empire or hegemony. Heywood (1997:145) defines imperialism (as the ideological *modus operandi* of an empire) as the policy of extending the power or rule of a state beyond its boundaries. In its earliest historical usage, imperialism was an ideology that supported military expansion and imperial acquisition by strongly focussing on nationalist and racialist doctrines. Currently the term is used more commonly to describe the system of political domination or economic exploitation that the pursuit of such goals helped to establish. Classic Marxism sees imperialism as an economic phenomenon that results from the pressure to export finance capital. In contrast, the Neo-Marxist view emphasizes a more subtle form of imperialism termed neo-colonialism. The neo-colonialist policy is used by industrial powers to control foreign territory by economic domination while respecting the territory's formal political independence. Still different to these views, realist theorists argue that imperialism is more a political phenomenon, rather observing it as the pursuit by states of power and strategic advantage through expansion and conquest. The policy of imperialism is exercised and mobilized by a dominant imperial power. Schroeder (2004:1) defines empire as "political control exercised by one organized political unit over another unit separate from and alien to it. Many factors enter into empire - economics, technology, ideology, religion, above all military strategy and weaponry - but the essential core is political: the possession of final authority by one entity over the vital political decisions of another." This does not necessarily mean that the empire has to exercise direct rule by formal occupation and administration. Historically, many empires have involved informal, indirect rule. However, a distinctive feature of a 'real' empire is the fact that they still hold effective and final authority. Simes (2003:91) is of the opinion that an empire possesses four characteristics.

- Firstly, empires exercise great authority over large and varied territories characterized by diverse ethnic groups, cultures and religions. In order to maintain their dominance, they have to rely on a broad range of tools and incentives such as political persuasion, economic advantage and cultural influence. Sometimes the use of coercion and force also becomes necessary. It is also generally expected of neighbouring states and dependencies to accept the power of the empire and to accommodate it.
- In most instances, empires emerged spontaneously rather than through a master plan. The whole structure and dynamics of the empire frequently evolve (as if following the laws of physics). An initial success generates momentum that is subsequently maintained by inertia or the tendency to remain unchanged over a long period of time. Each new advance or stage of progression creates challenges and opportunities that extend the empire's definition of its interests far beyond its original form. The Roman Empire originated on the Italian peninsula and quickly spread its influence and dominance across Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the British Isles.
- Empires do not necessarily always have sovereignty over their domains. This was the case with Athens as well as the early period of the Roman Empire, when the latter sought to dominate rather than have direct control over its dependencies.
- Despite all the unpleasant and even hostile present day connotations, the imperial experience was not uniformly negative. Historically, many previous empires were regarded as agents of change and progress and the intentions towards their subjects have generally been good. The United Kingdom serves as an example of an empire not only with a desire to promote development, but also a willingness to spend its resources towards that end (Simes 2003: 92-3).

The idea of a value and norm system that is enforced upon subjects is highlighted by Maier (2002:2) who argues that an empire can be regarded as a major actor in the international system based on the subordination of diverse nationalist élites who accept the values of those who govern the dominant center or metropole. These values are often accepted through compulsion or from shared convictions. A major factor that distinguishes an empire from an alliance is the inequality of power, resources and influence. The extensive use of Latin throughout the Roman Empire and English across the globe at the height (and even today) of the British Empire serve as examples.

In his discussion Ferguson (2003a:155-6) ponders the question whether hegemony is just a euphemism for 'empire' or whether it describes the role of a *primus inter pares*, or a country that leads its allies but does not rule subject peoples. The term hegemony (from the Greek *hegemonia*, meaning 'leader') was originally used to describe the relationship of Athens to the other Greek city-states that joined it in an alliance against the Persian Empire. Athens organized and directed its combined efforts but without securing permanent political power over the other members of the alliance. In the international system the role of leadership is performed by a 'hegemon' or a state possessing a sufficient capability to fulfil this role. Other states in the system have to define their relationship with the hegemon. They might do this by acquiescing, by opposing or remaining indifferent to its leadership (Evans and Newnham 1998:221). In a classic definition of hegemony, the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci refers to the concept as "the predominance of one social class over others (e.g. bourgeois hegemony). This represents not only political and economic control, but also the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinated by it accepts it as 'common sense' and 'natural'" (cited in Chandler 2004:1). This definition highlights the ability of one entity, group or state to dominate and influence others to accept its values and norms as something natural. In this regard Schroeder (2004:1) describes hegemony as "clear, acknowledged leadership and dominant influence by one unit within a community of units not under a single authority". Heywood (1997:190) agrees and adds that hegemony refers to the ascendancy or domination of one element of a system over others. The predominance of a state within a league or confederation is used as an example. According to Plano and Olton (1988:243) hegemony is the result of the extension by one state of preponderant influence or control over another state or region. The policy of hegemony often results in a client-state or satellite relationship in the creation of a sphere of influence. Dunne (1997:122) believes that hegemony is the influence a great power is able to establish over other states in the system, ranging from leadership to dominance. Kegley and Wittkopf (1999:215) agree and believe that hegemony is the ability to 'dictate', or even dominate the rules and arrangements by which international relations (political and economic) are conducted. For instance, it occurs in the world economy when a single great power garners a sufficient preponderance of material resources to dominate the flow of raw materials, capital and trade. From its preponderant position, a hegemon is able to promote rules for the whole global system that protects the hegemon's own interests. However, Ferguson (2003a:156) is of the opinion that hegemony implies more than mere leadership but less than outright empire. Hegemonic power refers to a state that is able to impose its sets of rules on the interstate system, thereby creating a new temporary political order. Russett *et al.* (2000:360) further highlight this point by describing a hegemonic system as one where "one state is able and willing to determine and maintain the

essential rules by which relations among states are governed". Hegemony is further perceived as 'first among equals', while an imperial power rules over subordinates. Decisions within a hegemonic power are taken in a more managerial and less authoritative fashion while an imperial power rules the system and imposes its decisions when it wishes (Schroeder 2004:1). States can, therefore, enjoy various forms of superiority or domination over other states without necessarily being empires. This point makes a critical distinction between the often synonymous use of empire and hegemony. Hegemony is frequently used as simply a less vivid way of saying 'imperialist', but according to Walzer (2003:28) it points to something different. It is rather a looser form of rule, less authoritarian than empire and more dependent upon the agreement of others. According to Schroeder (2004:1-2), hegemony is in principle also compatible with the current international system and composed of autonomous, coordinated units enjoying juridical equality (status, sovereignty, rights, and international obligations) regardless of differences in power. On the other hand, an empire is not that compatible. People favouring the idea that the American Empire is bringing freedom and democracy to the world are faced with a contradiction in terms because empire personifies the negation of political freedom, liberation and self-determination.

The main differences between empire and hegemony can be tabulated as follows:

EMPIRE	HEGEMONY
Empires follow a strategy of <b>authoritarian domination</b> . Rules and regulations are dictated to all subjects under its authority. Coercion and force are often used to make subordinates comply.	A form of <b>managerial leadership</b> is followed by the hegemony. The sovereignty of other states under its sphere of influence is respected. Decisions are made with the 'consent' of states under its influence.
Empires <b>rule</b> over their subjects. Subjects are expected to conform to the rules and regulations laid down by imperial authorities. Non-conformity is usually punished by force. In terms of decision-making processes, empires usually have final authority. Imperial rulers easily overrule decisions made by subjects.	Hegemons provide <b>acknowledged</b> leadership to states under its influence. It is a looser form of rule. The hegemon leads while other states follow, without the fear of being punished. Leadership depends on agreement of others.

Empires exercise <b>control</b> over their territories. Through regional government institutions the empire holds a firm grip over every frontier of its territory.	Hegemonies exercise <b>influence</b> over states in their sphere of influence. By managing states in its sphere of influence, the hegemon inspires, rather than controls.
Empires treat their subjects as <b>subordinates</b> . All cultures, religions and ethnicities other than that of the empire are treated as inferior. In fact, the empire enforces its so-called 'superior' value and norm system upon its (subordinate) subjects.	The hegemony treats states and entities under its sphere of influence as <b>equals</b> . The hegemon's values and norms are often accepted and adopted voluntarily by states under its influence.

In terms of the above discussion, significant differences between empire and hegemony come to light. In both cases one dominant or 'strong' state exercises control and/or influence over a number of 'weaker' states in its sphere of influence. However, in terms of the form of leadership and type of control that is exercised, the differences between these two systems become apparent. In terms of leadership, empires exercise a much 'harder', dictatorial and authoritarian approach whereas hegemonies follow a 'softer' and more managerial type of leadership strategy. Empires have to preserve their dominant role by means of force and coercion whereas hegemonies acknowledge the sovereignty (and therefore, the right to make autonomous decisions) of the states under their influence. Subjects under the rule of an empire are treated as 'property' with very little freedom to make individual choices. Empires, therefore, dominate nearly all aspects of their subjects' (regarded as subordinates) lives in an authoritarian fashion whereas the domination of a hegemonic power over its sphere of influence (not regarded as subordinates) is based on a more non-coercive, managerial type of leadership. As the title of the article suggests, an empire is compared with a school bully, who, through size and physical strength, is able to dominate weaker and smaller children in a coercive fashion. He lives by his own rules and nobody else tells him what to do. Hegemony is compared with a company boss who, for instance, acts as a manager over a specific division. He has authority but decisions made by people in his division are often respected and applied. In contrast to a bully, his own conduct is also controlled by specific company rules, preventing him from using physical force against people in his division.

### **3. AN AMERICAN EMPIRE OR HEGEMONY?**

The debate surrounding post September 11 world affairs is characterized by a viewpoint classifying the United States as a hegemony rather than an empire. A second view argues that the United States used to be a hegemony (especially during the Cold War) but that it recently acquired all the characteristics of an empire. A third view argues that the United States is now as much an empire as the British used to be during the height of their imperial domination.

#### **3.1 American hegemony**

Varsalona (2003:1) is of the opinion that since the end of World War II, the power status of the United States has transitioned from major power to superpower, to hegemony. Many observers are currently arguing that the United States is now surpassing its position as hegemony and even surpassing the label of 'hyper' power and is actually establishing a new phase of global dominance as an empire. Despite this view, Varsalona (2003:1) is of the opinion that the United States is not yet an empire (although the possibility of it becoming one is strong) because of the fact that there is another rising power that may challenge (rather than 'threaten') the unipolar system of the future. That power is China. Varsalona (2003:1-2) argues that the United States cannot simply be defined as an empire because it has recently become a tremendous power unparalleled by any previous power. If the latter were a global empire, one can easily imply that it has absolute control over every single aspect of foreign affairs such as trade and industry. At the moment the United States imports more than it exports, it relies heavily on its foreign trading partners and must, therefore, abide by international trade regulations. If the United States were a true empire it would, for argument sake, be able to forcefully open up the economy of China or possess the power to regulate oil prices in the Middle East. Trade regulations, however, do not allow this to happen. Although the United States has a significant impact on affairs such as trade regulations, it still cooperates with other states to create these regulations. Walzer (2003:28) supports this view when he argues that the United States often looks remarkably weak in the international arena. Despite investing in some of the most advanced weapons, it seems incapable of winning support for, let alone enforcing, political policies unless it goes to war - something that it cannot afford to do every time it is defied. Two incidents where this happened are noteworthy: South Korean refusal to cooperate with the U.S. policy towards North Korea and the Turkish government's refusal to open the way for an invasion of Iraq from its territory. Another example that is equally noteworthy was the international opposition to the Iraq War. How can there then be a global American Empire if it is true "that the whole world was against us?" In view of this Varsalona (2003:2) is of the opinion that the United

States is currently acting at the highest degree of hegemony and can even be considered as a 'super charged hegemony' or a 'hyper power' rather than an empire. The latter will probably not reach the status of empire because of the fact that its current position will possibly be challenged by China. China has already asserted its power over its region and has also played a fundamental role in controlling the state of affairs in East and Southeast Asia. It can, therefore, play a significant counter-balancing role in future because of the fact that its "vast territorial coverage, imperialistic history, immense population, exportation of goods, large military and cheap labor force has granted China the major power status and thus the order-sustaining power status of the region". Varsalona (2003:2-4) believes that the United States will remain a hegemony as long as there is a counterbalancing power to ensure that it does not use its authority too excessively. During the Cold War the Soviet Union fulfilled that purpose and China is currently in the position to do the same.

In his contribution, Schroeder (2004:2) also believes that the United States is not yet an empire. America, however, has clear imperial aspirations and can currently be referred to as a 'wannabe' empire. The current position of the US (which is more characteristic of a hegemony) is compatible with the international system we now have. This system is composed of autonomous and coordinated units enjoying juridical equality (status, sovereignty, rights and international obligations) regardless of the differences in power between states. In contrast to hegemony, an empire is not compatible to this system because of its coercive and authoritarian nature. American policy-makers would, therefore, have to consider their options very carefully before choosing the imperial route. Historically, empires have almost always been accompanied by overt and latent violence, disorder and war even though they have also, in some instances, provided a certain order and stability. Where a relatively stable international system of autonomous states exists (as is the case with the current system), attempts to make the system succeed and endure through imperial means have not only failed, but also produced massive instability, disorder and war. Schroeder (2004:2) further argues that throughout recent history leading powers have at critical junctures chosen empire over hegemony and by doing that, triggered large-scale disorder and war. Historians can pinpoint repeated instances over the last five centuries where leaders and powers, having the option between empire and hegemony, chose the path of empire, and thereby ruined themselves and the system. For example, the role played by the Austria-Hungarian Empire in the advent of World War I immediately springs to mind. In contrast to this, where real advances in international order, peace and stability have been achieved, they could be connected to choices made by leading powers in favour of a durable, tolerable hegemony rather than empire. Recent developments including globalisation, the rise of new states, the growth of non-governmental actors and

international institutions that have reshaped the international system, reinforce this longstanding trend, making the option of empire increasingly unworkable and counterproductive as a principle of order. However, these developments have made hegemony more possible, more needed and more potentially stable and beneficial.

### **3.2 From hegemony to empire**

An alternative (or 'interim') view also argues that the United States used to be a hegemony, during the time of the Cold War and the period just after the fall of communism, but that it started to show strong characteristics of an empire since the September 11 attacks. According to Thompson (2003:1-2) the so-called neo-conservative position has always regarded American policy and its position in the world as that of a hegemon or a "nation which seeks to lead the constellation of world nations into the end of history itself where the fusion of 'free' markets and liberal democracy is seen to be the institutional panacea of the world's ills and with this the enlargement of the capital's dominion". However, the deepening morass of the occupation of Iraq belies such intentions. To highlight this contradiction, Thompson (2003:1-2) refers to a statement by Paul Bremer in which he declared that "we dominate the scene [in Iraq] and will continue to impose our will on this country". This statement does not betray America's imperial motives but rather "the way that its hegemonic motives have ineluctably been pushed into a logic of imperial control". Thompson (2003:2) strongly suggests that America has become an empire by default and not by intention. Keyder (2003:1) is of the opinion that the United States could still be described as a hegemony until the early 1980s but this system slowly started to dismantle from the late 1980s onward. In his view the age of hegemony is over and the age of empire has started. Keyder (2003:1) further argues that American hegemony began its formation during the 1920s. The outlines of this hegemony can be found within the constitution of the Bretton Woods system that enabled states to improve and develop their economies under relative autonomy and also empowered them to modernize within a nation state framework. These states, therefore, supported the World Bank and other development institutions via the Marshall Plan. Before September 11, the world public was not aware of the fact that an empire even existed. In fact, until this watershed moment administration literature written within the framework of globalization always maintained the need for multilateral agreement. To a certain extent governments abandoned their own autonomy to participate in multilateral agreements and associations like the World Trade Organization. This view suggests that the United States could be regarded as hegemonic during the Cold War because the Soviet Union served as a counterbalance to keep the excessive use of its power intact. The US sphere of influence in the West (as a hegemonic system) was counterbalanced by the Soviet sphere of influence (also a hegemonic system) in the East. The

bipolar system ensured that neither of these hegemonic systems could dominate unilaterally. The fall of communism disturbed the counterbalance and the United States entered a new stage where it now became the sole superpower in world affairs.

### 3.3 American empire

The other side of the debating coin consists of a vast majority of commentators who believe that the United States already possess all the characteristics of an empire. According to Rilling (2003:5), among those who have talked of the American Empire are "Henry Kissinger, Gore Vidal, Tom Wolfe, Joseph Nye, Dinesh D'Souza, Charles Krauthammer, Robert Kaplan and Max Boot. The terminology employed by the 'Empire scholars' has adherents not just in the neo-conservative journalistic and academic camp. Essentially the use of the term American Empire is an attempt to give expression to the concept that America is no longer merely an exceptional, super, hyper or hegemonic power. What is needed is a 'gorilla of geopolitical designations' - the empire in other words. The shift in terminology from 'dominance' to 'hegemony' to 'empire' is significant, above all, because it highlights the classical concept of direct political control by an imperial center." The argument that the United States has passed the stage of hegemony and entered that of empire is strongly emphasized by this view. Ferguson (2003b:64) argues that if the term empire was defined narrowly enough, the United States could easily be excluded from this category (being an empire). If, for instance, empire were taken to mean the forcible military occupation and governance of territory whose citizens remain permanently excluded from political representation, the American Empire would be laughably small. The United States only accounts for about 6,5% of the world's surface and its 14 formal dependencies add up to a mere 0,007%. Demographically, the United States and its dependencies account for only five per cent of the world's population in comparison to the British Empire who ruled between one-fifth and one-quarter of the world's population at the peak of its power. The United States has few formal colonies, but it possesses small areas of territory within sovereign states that serve as military bases for its armed services. Before the invasion of Iraq the US military possessed around 752 military installations in more than 130 countries. The claim that the United States is not an empire rings hollow when measured against the full extent of the US military presence overseas. Again, compared with the British Empire who in military terms never dominated the full spectrum of its military capabilities, the United States is very far ahead of all its rivals. In fact, in terms of military capability and economic resources, it not only resembles the last great Anglophone Empire but also exceeds it. In September 2002 the Office of the President released a document on 'National Security Strategy' endorsing the US foreign policy goal to "extend the benefits of

freedom...to every corner of the world". On the other hand, however, the same strategy also asserts that the United States reserves the right, if the President deems it necessary, to take pre-emptive military action against any state perceived as a threat against US security (Ferguson 2003b:65-6).

Ferguson (2003b:66) further argues that the doctrine of pre-emption tips the scale in favour of the argument that the United States can be classified as an empire. However, it must be regarded as a peculiar kind of empire. In terms of its military and economic power it is peerless. This point is emphasized by the fact that "while the sole superpower remains more than ready to put its technological prowess to military use, its Western allies, wearied by centuries of fighting, have been quick to cash in their post-cold-war peace dividends and turn to more pacifist pursuits. Russia is diminished. China still lags behind. America's pre-eminence in the skies, at sea and on land is thus unchallenged...Matching this military might, runs the argument, is an unrivalled degree of economic power. Throw together all the outputs from Hollywood and Silicon Valley to Wall Street and Tin Pan Alley, and you have a commercial empire that would have been the envy of the British East India Company or Cecil Rhodes" (Internet: manifest destiny..., 2003:1). Despite the almost unchallengeable political and economic strength of the United States, it also possesses what many observers call 'soft power'. The latter refers to a state that may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other states want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example and aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness. Soft power is, therefore, "getting what you want without sticks or carrots". One should, nevertheless, not be so naïve as to assume that the 'American way' is attractive to everyone, everywhere. In many Arab states (most of whom have strong Muslim convictions) the 'McWorld' culture (in the words of Barber 1996:3-23) is still strongly opposed. Despite this, the global spread of information technology has enabled the United States to reach places with its 'soft power' that is much tougher to do with hard (military) power. The way in which McDonalds, Microsoft, Disney and Hollywood, to name but a few, have 'conquered' almost unimaginable territory such as communist China, Russia and even Cuba, exemplifies this point. Similarly, the British Empire also sought to make its values attractive to others through missionaries, businessmen, administrators and schoolmasters spread across the world. These efforts were later reinforced by technology. For example, after launching its foreign language service, by the end of 1938 the BBC was broadcasting around the world and in all the major languages of continental Europe (Ferguson 2003b:66).

According to Ferguson (2003b:67-8) the American empire, however, has certain limitations. In contrast to the British Empire that was based on colonization, the American version is based on net immigration. There are also limits to the way in

which its wealth can be utilized. For instance, the possibility of the US welfare system (with specific reference to Medicare and Social Security) outstripping tax revenues in the foreseeable future cannot be excluded. The prosperity and productivity of the United States has also become heavily reliant on large inflows of foreign capital. Keeping in mind that the current account deficit had risen above five per cent of GDP in 2002, much would depend on the willingness of foreign investors to put their savings into dollar-dominated assets.

In his contribution Ebeling (2003:1-2) identifies possible danger signs suggesting that the United States might already be an empire. He 'borrowed' these signs from a work entitled 'The peoples pottage' by the liberal author Garet Garrett, published in 1953. In the midst of the Korean War, Garrett attempted to persuade the American people that the United States was following a path that conflicted with the original conception of the nation. According to Ebeling (2003:1-2) the United States currently possesses the characteristics of the following six danger signs:

- The government's executive power becomes increasingly dominant. The balances and traditional institutional restraints on the three branches of government are weakened, while more and more discretionary power and authority is shifted to the Office of the President. The role of Congress becomes increasingly subservient while law-making and regulatory decision-making are transferred to bureaus and departments under the executives' control.
- Foreign policy matters become increasingly important at the cost of domestic policy issues. Especially since the end of the Second World War, the United States has taken on the role and status of a 'global policeman' to ensure "the peace of the world". Krauthammer (2003:5-17) argues that the fact that since the downfall of the Soviet Union, America has held a unique place on the world stage, exemplifies this point rather arrogantly. It produces almost one-third of the global GDP and spends more on military preparedness than the next twenty states put together. Its language and culture dominates world commerce, entertainment, science and technology as well as lifestyles. America has become the one great power within a unipolar world. He argues that the United States 'must' dominate the world if order, stability, freedom, democracy and justice are to be preserved and extended for mankind. To fulfil the task of being a 'global policeman', all other matters (including domestic issues) become of secondary importance. In this view the military presence of the United States across the globe presents a threat to the security of the American people at home.

- An empire threatens to result in the ascendancy of the military mind over the civilian mind. A characteristic of civil society in most democracies is that they place the dignity and privacy of the individual at the center of social affairs. Through trade and commerce, people voluntarily interact with one another in a peaceful way to mutually improve their lives. Contrary to this, the military mind imposes hierarchy over all those under the direction of the commander in chief. For example, as in the case of the 'liberation' of Iraq, the 'mission' always takes precedence over the individual and his life. The importance of military prowess and presence is emphasized at the expense of civilian life and its networks of non-coercive, market relationships.
- An empire usually creates a system of satellite nations. A fact that is common to all satellites is that their security is deemed vital to the security of the empire. Because of its perceived superior power and strength, the empire assumes responsibility for the security and well-being of the satellite nation. In return the satellite nation also undertakes to stand with its back to the empire and face the common enemy (Ebeling 2003:1-2).
- The empire cultivates a feeling of arrogance and superiority but also fear amongst the imperial people. Citizens of the state now regard themselves as 'masters of the world' and increasingly consider themselves as all-powerful and superior to those over whom their government has assumed guardianship. The discourse amongst citizens and politicians are increasingly characterized by references to 'our' superior values as well as 'our' power and importance to the rest of the world. However, being an empire also cultivates fear. Enemies and threats surround citizens of the empire, creating fears of attack and destruction from any corner of the world.
- The empire finally creates the illusion that a nation is a prisoner of history. This is reflected in the language of an empire which contains such phrases and ideas as "it is our time to maintain the peace of the world", or "it is our responsibility to save civilization and serve mankind". This creates a sense and an attitude of inevitability, that "if not us, then who?" Empire, therefore, becomes the burden that the imperial citizens not only must bear but from which there is no escape. A phrase such as "destiny has marked us for duty and greatness" becomes embedded in the moral fiber of such a society (Ebeling 2003:1-2).

Many of the 'danger signs' that were discussed above are reflected in the comments of Stephen Peter Rose, the director of the neo-conservative Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University. According to him the United States has no

rivals at the moment and are militarily dominant around the world. This military dominance is used to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries where the goal is not to combat any rival but to maintain the imperial position of the United States in maintaining an imperial order. He further argues that planning for imperial wars is different from planning for conventional international wars. This position has to be maintained with the maximum amount of force and should be used as quickly as possible for psychological impact - to demonstrate that the empire cannot be challenged with impunity. The United States has to make it its business to bring hostile governments down and surround itself with governments favourable to its interests. The imperial strategy must focus on preventing the emergence of powerful, hostile challengers to the empire: "by war if necessary, but by imperial assimilation if possible" (Rilling 2003:5). Ignatieff (2003:1) exemplifies these sentiments when he asks: "(W)hat word but empire describes the awesome thing that America is becoming? It is the only nation that polices the world through five global military commands; maintains more than a million men and women at arms on four continents; deploys carrier battle groups on watch in every ocean; guarantees the survival of countries from Israel to South Korea; drives the wheels of global trade and commerce; and fills the hearts and minds of an entire planet with its dreams and desires." Arrogant statements like these are often defended by modern liberal internationalists who prefer to think of empire in terms of the reluctant acceptance of responsibility for peoples and lands that must be 'rescued' from the primitive violence that threatens to engulf them if left on their own. The United States therefore, have a 'moral responsibility' to spread its superior values and norms (the idea of a global democracy comes to mind) to those states and peoples who are a threat to themselves and America's position in world affairs. The need to protect its position of power against possible threats, gives it the mandate to follow a course that has many characteristics of an empire. In support of this argument Ignatieff (2003:1-2) believes that "America's empire is not like the empires of times past, built on colonies, conquest and the white man's burden". Characteristics of this 21<sup>st</sup> century imperium are "free markets, human rights and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known. It is the imperialism of a people who remember that their country secured its independence by revolt against an empire, and who like to think of themselves as the friend of freedom everywhere. It is an empire without consciousness of itself as such, constantly shocked that its good intentions arouse resentment abroad. But that does not make it any less an empire, with a conviction that it alone, in Herman Melville's words, bears 'the ark of the liberties of the world'."

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study attempted to make a conceptual distinction between hegemony and empire in the light of the fact that many observers often use these two terms interchangeably and/or as synonyms. The apparent sensitivity and 'political incorrectness' that seem to stigmatize the word empire and the alternative use of hegemony as a 'softer' term also made such a conceptual distinction necessary. Some significant differences in terms of the nature of the type of domination exercised by empires and hegemonies were identified. Empires rule by making use of authoritarian style leadership (often implying coercion and force) over subjects that are regarded as subordinates. The value and norm system of the imperial rulers are also enforced upon these subjects. In contrast, a managerial style leadership that has influence over 'equal' subjects within its sphere of influence characterizes hegemonies. The values and norms of the hegemon are usually adopted voluntarily by the states or entities within its sphere of influence. The second aim of the study was to also distinguish between the views of academics, journalists and theorists regarding their motivation for classifying the United States as either an empire or a hegemony.

Some observers describe the United States as a hegemony because of the fact that in terms of size, extent of its territorial domination and economic power it is still just too small in size to compare with, for instance, the Roman and British Empires. The latter two empires possessed, at some stage in their histories, world domination. Despite its current unipolar position, the sole position of domination of the United States might in future be threatened by a state such as China. The current focus on multilateral cooperation in world affairs also makes the existence of an American Empire (based on unilateral decision-making) highly unlikely. The study further focused on the views of an alternative stream of thought with strong convictions that the United States could be regarded as a hegemony during the Cold War but that it started to show strong characteristics of an empire just after the September 11 attacks.

The current debate, however, is dominated by the view that America already possesses all the characteristics of an empire. Some of the fiercest criticism against an 'American empire' is currently coming from developing states (especially Africa), anti-globalization movements and Islamic states. One possible reason for the criticism coming from these groups, is the fact that they view themselves as the 'subordinate' subjects of the American empire. The sole military and economic dominance of the United States, its defiance of the United Nations as well as the way in which it interferes in the domestic affairs of other states (Pakistan and Iraq) without regard for the target states' sovereignty are to these observers evidence

enough of the existence of an 'American empire'. The fact that the Bush administration attacked Iraq without clear-cut evidence of so-called 'weapons of mass destruction', its defiance of a UN decision not to attack and the unwillingness of nearly all its previous Western allies (except the U.K.) to assist it, further strengthens the argument in favour of empire. Many observers perceive the international spread of American style consumer culture as the typical enforcement of a value system upon 'subordinates' by an imperial power.

In answering the question whether the United States is an empire or hegemony one is confronted with various opposing arguments that make the task so much more difficult. However, this study did not attempt to argue in favour of one or the other and, therefore, made use of the fairly 'safe' assumption that it shows strong characteristics of both empire and hegemony. The United States is, without a doubt, the sole undisputed political and economic power in current affairs without any significant competition. In the light of this Jervis (2003:83) argues that "nations enjoying unrivaled global power have always defined their national interests in increasingly expansive terms. Resisting this historical mission creep is the greatest challenge the United States faces today." Whether referring to the United States as an empire or hegemony, one fact remains absolutely clear: as the most powerful state on earth it dominates, influences, controls, manages and leads all other states, actors and entities under its now 'international' sphere of influence. The likelihood of the rise of another dominant state to oppose its current position in the near future seems unlikely. The way in which the United States invaded Iraq, in defiance of the rest of the world, seemed to be a clear indication of its strong imperialistic characteristics. On the other hand, the way in which it inspired and influenced many states within its sphere of influence to acquire democratic values shows stronger hegemonic characteristics. To argue that the United States currently has the same expansionist aspiration as the British or Roman Empires used to have would, however, be questionable. The sole intention of the United States now seem to be the preservation of its dominant position by expanding its political and economic interests and protecting its citizens (especially in the aftermath of September 11).

Whether focus is placed on people, states or other entities, the deep-rooted fear of being dominated has always existed. This, for instance, implies the inability to make own decisions or to govern oneself without the interference from another. It also implies having to function under enforced rules and regulations, having had no decision-making influence in those rules. The evils of the most vulgar form of domination, slavery, have for hundreds of years fuelled this fear. Both empire and hegemony are characterized by one powerful state that dominates a number of weaker states in its sphere of influence. The only difference is the nature and extent

of the domination. The fear of being dominated, whether from an African, Neo-Marxist, Islamic or anti-globalization perspective, has given meaning and purpose to the current debate.

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