

# Once a Republic, Now an Empire?

by Gabriele Liebig

Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche was the first to stress that the events of Sept. 11, 2001 must be seen as an attempt of certain U.S. intelligence and establishment circles to launch a non-stop war against Islam; and indeed, against any nations opposed to a New World Order which would be a parody of the Roman Empire. The drum is now being beaten, before a broad public, for America's new imperial role.

Particular notice should be given to a piece of purple prose from the pen of Michael Ignatieff, a "liberal" political scientist now teaching at Harvard, which appeared in the *New York Times* Sunday Magazine on Jan. 5, under the title "The Burden." *US News & World Report* came out with a special issue the same week, entitled "Towards a New American Empire?" while a widely-read website, stratfor.com, ran a story entitled "American Empire" without the question mark.

## **'Shouldering the Imperial Burden'**

Though not from the camp of those crash purveyors of agitprop, Wolfowitz-Perle-Shultz, Ignatieff makes a fervent plea for war against Iraq. Wielding what are purportedly arguments taken from history, his piece boils down to a claim that history requires of America that it conduct an Iraq war. It must acknowledge its role as the head of Empire, and call a spade a spade. America, that liberal Republic, must stop vacillating, and boldly proclaim that it is now an Empire.

No other nation, writes Ignatieff, "polices the world through five global military commands. . . . Being an imperial power, however, is more than being the most powerful nation or just the most hated one. . . . It means laying down the rules America wants . . . while exempting itself from other rules. Iraq represents the first in a series of struggles to contain the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the first attempt to shut off the potential supply of lethal technologies to a global terrorist network. . . . Weapons of mass destruction would render Saddam the master of a region that, because it has so much of the world's proven oil reserves, makes it what a military strategist would call the empire's center of gravity."

Ignatieff is of course aware of the fact that "unseating an Arab government in Iraq while leaving the Palestinians to face Israeli tanks and helicopter gunships is a virtual guarantee of unending Islamic wrath against the United

States. . . . Properly understood, then, the operation in Iraq entails a commitment, so far unstated, to enforce a peace on the Palestinians and Israelis. . . . If an invasion of Iraq is delinked from Middle East peace, then all America will gain for victory in Iraq is more terror cells in the Muslim world.” Although Ignatieff may well see this as a means to shatter part of the opposition to the Iraq War, his argument is feeble. Why must the U.S.A. become an Empire, and launch war against Iraq, if its goal is peace in the Middle East? Since Israel is utterly dependent for its finances on the U.S.A., one would have thought it would suffice to pull the plug on all support to Ariel Sharon.

Michael Ignatieff’s grandfather, P.N. Ignatyev, was the Education Minister in Russia’s Tsarist Government, and his great-grandfather, N.P. Ignatyev, founded the Tsarist secret police, known as the Okhrana. Michael sees himself as the liberal spokesman of a reluctant imperialism, Empire Light perhaps. Imperialism, or so Ignatieff would have it, is a burden, which America can and must shoulder.

But Ignatieff is a Canadian citizen, with close ties to Great Britain, and, indeed, his imperialist views are very like those of the British school of “liberal imperialists,” notably Robert Cooper, Tony Blair’s foreign-policy guru, and Oxford historian Niall Ferguson.

## Europe and the Empire

In Ignatieff’s imperial World Order, room will be left for America’s “wealthy European allies.” He sees little point in further ruffling the feathers of the Europeans, who have been downgraded to “reluctant junior partners,” seething with resentment. He accordingly proposes that the U.S.A. “include Europeans in the governance of their evolving imperial project. The Americans essentially dictate Europe’s place in this new grand design. The United States is multilateral when it wants to be, unilateral when it must be; and it enforces a new division of labor in which America does the fighting, the French, British and Germans do the police patrols in the border zones and the Dutch, Swiss and Scandinavians provide the humanitarian aid.

“Sept. 11 rubbed in the lesson that global power is still measured by military capability. The Europeans discovered that they lacked the military instruments to be taken seriously and that their erstwhile defenders, the Americans, regarded them, in a moment of crisis, with suspicious contempt.”

To the degree that one follows the official line, and accepts that the attack on the Twin Towers was indeed the act of Islamic terrorists alone, that sentence is utterly illogical, since the attacks were against the world’s militarily strongest nation. The passage makes sense, only when one reads the scenario implemented on Sept. 11 as a “deadly lesson,” a lever to heave onto the scene an American Empire, along with a new U.S. strategic doctrine of preventive military attacks.

Ignatieff’s outline for Empire goes far beyond the Iraqi question. However, he makes it plain that the attitude vis à

vis that war, both within and outside the U.S.A., is decisive in assessing whether or not the imperial project will be able to move smartly ahead. In other words, to go along with the war, amounts to meekly taking up one’s place in the new imperial division of labor. And that will mean the overthrow of all international law, in favor of a Hobbesian order. What some might see at first glance, as a *pax americana*, a state of imperial peace to be aspired to, will rather prove to be *bellum americanum*, a state of permanent war, lasting years, perhaps decades.

## Imperial Strength or Weakness?

How very hollow rings the claim that imperial wars are being conducted in the name of democracy and freedom, is shown by the fact that, within the U.S.A. itself, the war against terrorism has led to ever-more-intolerable infringement on civil rights. This Ignatieff does admit, just as he owns that in the “conquered, liberated and democratized” countries, “real power . . . will lie with Washington.”

After World War II, the German people took very seriously the demand, by Nuremberg Prosecutor Robert Jackson, that war of aggression henceforth be deemed a crime against humanity. In 1949, that became a keystone of the UN Charter, and was included in the German Constitution. And yet Germany is faced with an American government that arrogates preventive, aggressive war. America’s friends need pay attention to one unintentional warning in Ignatieff’s piece: “To call America the new Rome is at once to recall Rome’s glory and its eventual fate at the hands of the barbarians. . . . Even at this late date, it is still possible to ask: Why should a republic take on the risks of empire?”

## The Other America

The question, though a rhetorical one in Ignatieff’s mouth—he comes back with a veritable litany of arguments for war on Iraq—is of clinical interest nevertheless. A nation that, while fully aware of the risk of imperial decay, yet gambles all for a display of sheer military strength worldwide, is not just given over to reckless bravado: that nation has its back up against the wall. It is domestic weakness, and above all, economic weakness, that has led it to strongarm the world.

Relentlessly, U.S. Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, that not-unknown leader of the opposition, has warned both his fellow citizens and the world, that the real threat to America is scarcely Saddam Hussein or al-Qaeda, but the onrushing collapse of the financial system, and the world’s leading economies. The scribblers churning out paeans of praise to a new Empire should think on this: Your Empire will sink, before it ever floats. On the other hand, if America has the sense to pull the economy back onto its feet, and to reorganize the bankrupt world financial system, there will be real support for American leadership—but not with Empire, and not with war.