

It makes it difficult to know who speaks for Uncle Sam, but we need not always assume the worst.

Cultural imperialism

It is not only foreigners but more often Americans who take for granted the end of American hegemony. One scholar, Bruce Russett, has pointed out, however, that "cultural hegemony has proved a major resource to the hegemon in maintaining its general hegemony." The United States continues to exert, without trying, a powerful centripetal force. There can be arguments about the quality of American culture, but not about its universal attraction. As Noel Coward once sang at Las Vegas, "But I like America — every scrap of it, all the sentimental crap of it." Satellites and computers now spread or spew it further. Like it or not, America is great theater. "The American public has a melodramatic sense of reality," according to Carlos Fuentes.

If power could be yielded gracefully...

There is grave danger that Americans, uneasy about their economic future, resentful of allies who do not see the world as they do and poor countries that are ungrateful, cynical about international institutions in which they are less dominant, will seek that isolationist alternative of exceptionalism. They are not likely to succeed, but in the meantime our international infrastructure could crumble without their constructive participation.

The sublimation of empires so vast and clumsy as the American and the Russian is bound to take time. The Cold War has been a framework for hostility and military

exhaustion, but in recent years it has also been a framework for deterrence, détente and negotiation, and even the most peaceful internationalist may feel a little lost without it. Some people will insist that nothing has changed lest they lose their bearings, and others, with an eye on the budget, will conclude that the Soviet empire has changed overnight. We must beware of the panic that accompanies the disillusionment of the impatient. We must, as Canadians, realize also that a shift from superpower hegemony to wider international structures will require more responsibility for middle powers. One of the strongly entrenched myths in this country is that in a golden age we were constructivists in international institutions, but no longer are. That view ignores our solid and helpful role in the Law of the Sea, financing of the UN, in the Cairns group of middle powers at GATT, in working for consensus in the Assembly and the reform from within of UNESCO and FAO, not to mention our initiatives on Africa. None of this is sudden and spectacular enough to attract the media. Building the infrastructure of international collaboration may be boring, but let us not forget that it should be the purpose of all peace-lovers to make the world more boring.

As for the future of the American empire, I am still betting on the good guys, but I would like to draw to their attention the words of Edmond Burke when he was addressing his own empire on behalf of the American colonists in March 1775: "Magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom and a great empire and little minds go ill together." □

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