



Empire of Disorder

Alain Joxie

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Empire of Disorder puts forward the argument that the US is currently involved in an imperial enterprise, but refuses to undertake any of the responsibilities that go along with such a position on the world stage. Joxie draws heavily on the ideas of Hobbes and Clausewitz to argue that we are currently experiencing a time of disorder and chaos characterized by ‘cruel little wars’ that can be likened to the state of nature preceding the inauguration of the state. His fundamental claim is that the Leviathan, which arises out of such a circumstance to reimpose order and stability, holds its sovereign position and wields power on the condition that it offers protection to the people it rules. Failure to do so and a slippage back into chaos reopens the way for another sovereign power that can guarantee order to take its place.

Joxie claims that America is the last great imperial power left after the finish of the cold war ended the polarization of the East and the West and has been granted the position of Leviathan almost by default. It pursues imperialism both on the military and economic fronts through interference in a multitude of local conflicts and the exporting of neoliberal capitalism throughout the world. According to Joxie, America bears the responsibility for the disordered state of the world, not only by virtue of its pre-eminent position, but also because of the roots of many local conflicts in US sponsored macroeconomic globalization. These local conflicts are managed on the international stage by a policy of papering over the local cracks at the global level. This is in contrast to the European policy of creating stable sociohistorical identities that can coexist in peace. As the stabilizing influence of the nation-state drops out of the picture in political terms, thanks to military intervention and economic globalization, localized conflicts erupt in the wake of its passing.

According to Machiavellian idea, as well as by Hobbesian implication, rulers owe a debt of protection to the ruled, and it is at this point that America should bear the responsibility that goes along with its international role by helping to stabilize, both economically and militarily, the worldwide state of disorder. While, therefore, America reaps the benefits of its position, it refuses the



concurrent responsibility. It fulfils rather his definition of a 'predatory empire', one in which economic growth proceeds on the basis of military expansion opening up new markets.

This is both an interesting and timely argument. On the economic side, it can be read in the light of Stiglitz's (2002) *Globalisation and its Discontents* in which the former Chief Economist of the World Bank commented on the international economic policy of that organization and the IMF, and therefore of America. He claimed that there was a great deal of mismanagement in the handling of global economics because of the *ad hoc* case-by-case approach of those organisations, which served to exacerbate rather than solve the problems of global poverty. The *ad hoc* nature of American interventionism on the military front is a criticism made by Joxie, tied into the cause of conflict rooted in the policies of economic globalism.

On the military front, the 'war on terrorism', and its latest phase of pending conflict with Iraq, lends a certain urgency to the arguments made in the book. The war on terror, Joxie claims, is a good example of the refusal to stabilize areas, which, by implication have been rendered unstable by the US foreign policy, even after intervening in them. Regime change in 'rogue states' is not an adequate solution.

Joxie is a specialist in strategic affairs and contemporary wars and, while there are no detailed discussions of the 'cruel little wars' beyond general points about their roots that one would expect from such a background, there is a certain authority to his pronouncements. Greater detail regarding certain local conflicts, such as Kosovo, Bosnia, Columbia and Palestine is found, however, in two interviews contained in the book, which precede the main work and which serve to preface some of the ideas on the nature of the US imperialism. The grounding of his arguments in thinkers such as Hobbes and Clausewitz is detailed and interesting, although often the reader is left to do the work of tying these analyses into the contemporary situation.

The only important flaw in the argument is the lack of discussion on the alternatives to US imperialism that Joxie sees as lying in European republicanism. How this resistance or alternative is to be mobilized is never made clear other than in tantalizing hints about democracy and popular sovereignty prevailing over oligarchy, as well as a reference at one point to NGOs. These avenues are not pursued, however, nor is the possibility of resistance on the stage of international supraorganizations such as the UN. This is the route that Stiglitz (2002) suggests and could be seen as an attempt to fulfil imperial responsibility. This does not detract, however, from the fact that Joxie has constructed an interesting perspective with which to judge the rapidly unfolding international events that confront the world today.



Reference

Stiglitz, J. (2002) *Globalisation and its Discontents*. London: Allen Lane.

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