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**A Discursive Analysis of President George W. Bush's  
Afghanistan Policy:  
Discovering the New Imperialism**

By Taylor Raymond

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Faculty Advisor: Maliha Chishti  
Preceptor: Yubing Sheng

**Abstract:**

This paper builds on a growing body of literature that utilizes decolonization as a paradigmatic lens to examine the actions of Western states. Focusing on Afghanistan, I seek to unmask and interrogate the way President George W. Bush used the historical moment of September 11<sup>th</sup> to bring American foreign policy across the precipice of an Empire. Therefore, this study seeks to examine not only *what* America was doing in Afghanistan, but *why* we were there, *how* we perceived ourselves and Afghans.

This study argues that one can detect the continuity of a colonial worldview within the War on Terror. As such, the American invasion into Afghanistan was primarily used to establish American cultural primacy and a global hegemony. To substantiate this claim, this paper focuses on decolonization literature to identify patterns within the extensive Presidential speech records in order to unmask the implicit assumptions, ideas, and values that underpin the American War on Terror in Afghanistan.

## I. Introduction

The international community was built from and by the domination of Others. The thread of colonialism connects continents and peoples and disguises international relations' historical formation as a neutral Eurocentric theoretical practice. The so-called decolonization period following the Second World War, when many of the great empires disbanded, coincided with the birth of state-building, leading to the formation of new states across continents and an international architecture of rising multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations. Born from the colonial world order, the United Nations has reconstituted colonial power difference as evidenced by the security council and the agenda of the organization itself.

The colonial mapping of international relations extends beyond the discipline to its practices and outcomes as well. Because of this, the practice of state-building cannot be delinked from the ongoing power differences of these colonial modalities. The field of state-building includes building and legitimizing state structures to support more considerable and long term peacebuilding efforts.<sup>1</sup> Billions of dollars a year are pledged by the international community to aid in the recovery and rebuilding of post-conflict societies and so-called failed states. Since 1997 there have been numerous state-building efforts around the world with varying degrees of failure.<sup>2,3</sup> The United States has engaged in state-building more than any other country,<sup>4</sup> mainly because of its ability to facilitate regime change.

The international aid community has been working toward state-building endeavors that result in democratically stable states for the greater part of two decades, fueled by billions of

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<sup>1</sup> Sisk, "State-building with Credibility," 5.

<sup>3</sup> "Between World War II and the present the United States intervened more than 35 times in developing countries around the world... In only one case – Columbia... did a full-fledged, stable democracy emerge within 10 years" (George Downs report in the *Los Angeles Times* in Mearsheimer 2011, 28).

<sup>3</sup> Mearsheimer, "Imperial by Design," 28; Fukuyama, "After the Neocons," 131.

<sup>4</sup> Monten, Jonathan. "Intervention and State-Building."

dollars and thousands of aid workers that move from crisis to crisis. At the start of the 2000's state-building was re-affirmed as a critical component to the international community and as such, today nearly every major international donor and aid agency identifies state-building as a critical component and key objective.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the success rate of protracted aid ventures is uninspiring at best. As Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk note in their 2009 paper, effective state-building "requires more than simply identifying 'lessons learned' from previous missions. Rather it also demands more awareness and analysis of the tensions, contradictions and dilemmas of state-building."<sup>6</sup>

The United States, having participated in the imperialist roots of international relations (as a discipline) and state-building (as a global-north construct), has leveraged the practice of state-building to weave its national interests into international activities.<sup>7</sup> The United States has slowly taken up the banner of Empire. Early in its history the formation of the United States is intricately linked to the conquest of indigenous people and the annexation of other territories, such as Hawaii. The United States acquired power early as a nation, despite its self-representation as the global proprietor of democracy. Francis Fukuyama articulates this point as, "the American exercise in imperialism is inherently hypocrisy – looking back at [its] attendance of the Versailles Conference of 1916, fighting for the fall of three empires, and cozying up to former European colonial interests as the model of the greatest successful colonial uprising."<sup>8</sup> The United States has used this reputation, as the purveyor of democracy, to talk out of both sides of its mouth – helping to liberate and then to dominate smaller nations. This strategy was first deployed in Cuba and then recycled over and over again until the iteration of

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<sup>5</sup> Menocal, Alina Rocha, "State Building for Peace," 1718.

<sup>6</sup> Paris, Roland and Timothy Sisk, "The Dilemmas of Statebuilding," 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ignatieff, "Empire Lite," 120.

<sup>8</sup> Fukuyama, "After the Neocons," 120.

this generation - the takeover of Iraq and Afghanistan. Recent scholarship has pointed to the complexities of state-building in Afghanistan and Iraq as directly related to the US-led invasion and occupation. Most of the previous cases of state-building, like Namibia (1989), Cambodia (1991), Mozambique (1992), Bosnia (1995), and Kosovo (1999), were driven by protracted civil wars and carried out in coalitions at the direction of the United Nations, this difference has made installing a legitimate government nearly insurmountable.<sup>9</sup>

This paper will focus specifically on the invasion of Afghanistan that occurred in 2001, and continues to this writing. The invasion of Afghanistan marks a shift in the practice of state-building and its accompanying humanitarian aid infrastructure that is derived from the international community, reframing the practice under a new foreign policy lens that leans heavily on the presumption of rooting out terrorism, but on further examination is supported by a Manichaeic worldview.

The emergence of the Global War on Terror (WoT) and the Bush Doctrine carries on the long tradition of America's participation in the global imperial project. While President George W. Bush was not the beginning nor the end of this legacy, the temporal scope of this paper will examine the moment after September 11<sup>th</sup> when the debate about the American Empire stretched to the mainstream political vernacular.<sup>10</sup> It is from the following position that this paper takes up its argument; acknowledging as a starting point the historical legacy of US imperialism as theorized by other authors<sup>11</sup> there is a vast history of America as a so-called "hidden" empire, this paper will unmask September 11<sup>th</sup> and the invasion of Afghanistan as the start of America as

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<sup>9</sup> Barnett, "Peace Building and State-Building;" Gisselquist, "Introduction: Aid and Institution-Building;" Van Bijlert, "Imaginary Institutions;" Paris and Sisk, "The Dilemmas of State Building."

<sup>10</sup> Cox, "Empire, Imperialism and the Bush Doctrine," 591.

<sup>11</sup> See Michael Ignatieff (2003), Michael Cox (2004), Francis Fukuyama (2006), and Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri (2000).

an overt empire. This paper asks a different set of questions than normative studies on the US intervention in Afghanistan and seeks to better understand the internal government reactions and discourses of the invasion. Using this context and relying on the wealth of decolonization literature, I seek to examine how the United States perceives itself and its role in Afghanistan.

My analysis examines empire as America's exceptionalism, constructed at the nexus of perceived cultural superiority and the formation of it as a benevolent hegemon operating in Afghanistan.

This paper will first contextualize Afghanistan within its own history and as a longstanding target of imperial interests. It will then examine the relevant literature related to decolonization, empires and state-building. First, the literature review will situate the core argument of this thesis within the broader scholarly debates. Second, a detailed overview of the guiding questions and methodological approach will be included, focusing on the power dynamics and inequalities that can be found in the language of empire. Then, this paper will analyze speeches made by President George W. Bush alongside a selected interview from a top US government official published by the Washington Post's collection entitled the *Afghanistan Papers*. Finally, it concludes that American action in Afghanistan indeed acted as an imperial power by asserting its perceived cultural dominance and leading the world as a hegemony that sought to make the world over in its image.

## **II. Overview of Afghanistan**

Preceding the proxy wars of the 1980's and the invasion of 2001, Afghanistan's geographical shape was born from the British Imperial project. The British and the Russian empires fought several wars on this land in the hopes of increasing the protection of their geo-

political interests and territories. Despite foreign meddling, this land remained dominated by ethnic and religious tribes dotting the landscape. Of significance is the region along the Afghan and Pakistan border, known by some under its colonial name as The Durand Line. This “border” was demarcated in some faraway colonial encampment of Sir Mortimer Durand, the Foreign Secretary for colonial India.<sup>12</sup> This arbitrary line, dividing the Pashtun population, would come to be the catalyst for violence and rebellion at the border for generations. It would also create an imaginary boundary enjoining ethnic groups that had little to nothing in common, and antagonizing local power networks and exacerbating these groups' differences. The haphazard colonial game the British played with land and people carved up an entire continent, disregarding ethnic, religious, and nationalist preferences in order to obtain resources or great compromises with other empires of the time.<sup>13</sup>

Geographically, Afghanistan has therefore been a historical location for power grabs due to its proximity to Asia and Eurasia. This control was handed from the patriarchal British Empire to the newly baptized American Empire through a succession of overt and covert operations in the region in the 1950s. The most notorious of which occurred in 1953 and saw the overthrow of the democratically elected Mosaddegh government in Iraq by the United States.<sup>14</sup> It is also through this history that we see the entrance of the United States through its covert destabilizing proxy wars in Afghanistan and the construction of empire.

### **III. Literature Review**

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<sup>12</sup> Gregory, "The Colonial Present," 31.

<sup>13</sup> Harvey, "The New Imperialism."

<sup>14</sup> Harvey, "The New Imperialism," 20.

Scholarship around the decolonization of international relations theory started predominantly from the global south, although there is some debate about the origins it is linked to the rise of Marxist critiques. Seminal writings come from Partha Chatterjee (India), and Mahmood Mamdani (Uganda) and has within the last decade spread to continental Europe and Canada with scholars like Derek Gregory (Canada), David Harvey (United Kingdom), and Bill Cooke (United Kingdom). This scholarship aims to critically examine what Paris and Sisk referred to as historical ‘lessons learned’ from previous state-building missions and place them within the context of their colonial roots.

Yet as International Relations scholarship within the United States currently stands, only a small handful of scholars are engaging in this type of work. This paper aims to engage the paradigmatic lens of decoloniality to critically examine the US government’s state-building projects associated with the War on Terror. Therefore, the literature review will explore how the interconnectedness of the definition of Empire inevitably shapes the way in which you name the empire. It will then seek to tie the international aid structure into this imperial system to show the importance of questioning the systems that the invasion of Afghanistan claimed to operate under.

### **A. Understanding the Empire Construct**

For some, the idea of state-building may appear as a departure from the classic conception of an empire – that of holding foreign lands and controlling the colony from a central metropole. But we see that through history, empires have changed names and constructions many times: the Romans, the Ottomans, Imperial Chinese, Russian Soviet, Austro-Hungarian, Napoleonic, British, French, and now American. The re-invention of what empire means is not new to human history, and some scholars argue that historical interpretation over a definitive



definition of empire will continue as there is not one pattern to fit all cases.<sup>15</sup> Through the new recapitulation of the American development regime - built and sustained largely through the budgets of such organizations as USAID, the Department of Defense, and the United Nations – militant force bought aid to Afghanistan<sup>16</sup> and has thereafter been sustained through similar means. Michael Ignatieff acknowledges this reality “it is imperial because it requires imperial means: garrison of troops and foreign civilian administrators, and because it serves imperial interests: the creation of long-term political stability...”<sup>17</sup>

Empire is not merely the accumulation of conquered lands, but as Derek Gregory maps out in his efforts to connect decolonization literature together with the tradition of geography, it is a pattern of imperial tendencies, which he states are “the capacities that inhere with the colonial past are routinely reaffirmed and reactivated in the colonial present”<sup>18</sup> and ultimately culminate in the declaration of the War on Terror. By tracing the physical manifestation of colonial power he creates a mapped conception of the colonial present.<sup>19</sup> Derek Gregory, quoting Seumas Milne, observed that the “roots of the global crisis which erupted on September 11<sup>th</sup> lie in precisely those colonial experiences and the informal quasi-imperial system that succeeded them.”<sup>20</sup>

Harvey explains America’s resistance to formally hold lands as “its own internalized form of racism (towards black and indigenous peoples) was paralleled by an antagonism to 'non-Caucasian' more generally that curbed the temptation to absorb territories (such as that of Mexico or the Caribbean) where non-Caucasian populations dominated.”<sup>21</sup> Through its other

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<sup>15</sup> Maier, “Empire’s Past... Empire’s Future,” 6 and 13 – 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ignatieff, “Empire Lite,” 16.

<sup>17</sup> Ignatieff, “Empire Lite,” 59.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory, “The Colonial Present,” 7.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory, Derek. *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Gregory, “The Colonial Present,” 10.

<sup>21</sup> Harvey, “The New Imperialism,” 47.

means of oppression – its dominance in the state-building space, allows it to control how post-conflict states rebuild; through international organizations and its total control of the economic landscape; and via its control over the definition of what constitutes *modernity*, America has successfully controlled the outcomes of states (re)construction.<sup>22</sup>

The construction of empire is just as important as the name and function that it takes, and the American Empire grew from geographical, economic, and military domination that stretches back decades. This manifested in a number of ways; in the late 70s and early 80s it was economic and democratic experiments, overthrowing democratically elected governments in South America, using economic shock therapy in Poland after the dissolve of the Soviet Union, and the violent devaluation of assets throughout East and South-East Asia, to list only a small subsection of examples.<sup>23</sup>

Charles Maier extensively analyzed what constitutes an empire, its construction, manifestations, iterations, and its reproduction in his 2007 book *Among Empires*. He argues that the construction of the empire does not have one tract nor does it not follow a set analogue across time. Rather, there is a wider ranging vision and interpretation of what an empire is and still *could* be. He defines this inequality across two different special domains, the horizontal which most are familiar with, and the vertical which collects and recruits power and wealth. In this vertical space is the complex and nuanced empire – one that relies on the complicity of the local elites but also the global community to participate<sup>24</sup>, as also mentioned by Michael Ignatieff.

Even more critical to the understanding of the construction of the empire can be distilled from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's seminal piece *Empire* where they outline the very birth of

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<sup>22</sup> Ignatieff, "Empire Lite," 79, 90, 100, and 107.

<sup>23</sup> Kinzer, Stephen. "Overthrow," and Klein, Naomi. "The Shock Doctrine."

<sup>24</sup> See Ignatieff, "Empire Lite."

the structure of an empire and how it forms. Important to this discussion, they state that Empire is not formed by force alone, but more specifically from the “capacity to present force as being in the service of right and peace.”<sup>25</sup> Derived from the ability to determine what is right and peace and the ability to enforce such standards across the world, the construction of the empire is created from the invention of conflict and disorder. Even more critical to this discussion is Hardt and Negri’s two-fold assertion that empires are “not born of its own will but rather it is *called* into being and constituted on the basis of its capacity to resolve conflicts,” and to achieve this aura the empire must first “enlarge the realm of the consensus that support[s] its own power.”<sup>26</sup> This is a critical pattern of construction that will be utilized heavily in the analysis in conjunction with speeches from George W. Bush. As mentioned previously, this definition also rests on the complicity of other states (Europe), to support the “realm of consensus” and legitimate the power of the Empire (the United States). This paper will utilize Michael Doyle’s definition of an empire as it connects these and many other strands, he qualifies empire as, “a relationship, formal or informal in which one states controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society.”<sup>27</sup> This is further contextualized and extended by adding, “it can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by social, economic, or cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process of maintaining the empire.”<sup>28</sup>

## **B. Naming America an Empire**

John Mearsheimer underscores the unilateral intention of the mission in Afghanistan by detailing the Bush Doctrine as a neoconservative agenda grounded in a belief of American

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<sup>25</sup> Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri, “Empire,” 15.

<sup>26</sup> Hardt and Negri, “Empire,” 15.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Cooke, Bill, “From Colonial Administration to Development Management,” 5.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Cooke, Bill, “From Colonial Administration to Development Management,” 5.

exceptionalism.<sup>29</sup> But the case he makes can be applied more broadly and is supported by such scholars as Michael Ignatieff, Francis Fukuyama, and Michael Cox who have built the foundation for categorizing America as a new imperial power.

Ignatieff specifically acknowledges and endorses the American imperial project. Ignatieff draws from several decades of experience of post-conflict interventions in countries such as Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan to detail how American imperialism has risen to power and succeeded through a monopoly of military force, technology, and the complicit financial support of the European Union.<sup>30</sup> At the core of his analysis are the imperial implications of American actions abroad – whether through what he calls the spiritual component, assisting former enemies to reconcile and to transcend a painful past or through the less spiritual means which he describes as the deployment of troops and foreign administration to achieve its end goal.<sup>31</sup> The end goal, as articulated by Ignatieff, is to create a border zone that is essential to the West’s construction of security and this is achieved through the West’s monopoly on force, power, and technology. Ultimately, Ignatieff leans on the idea that America sees itself as exceptional and therefore has a unique right to be within and control the spaces of international securitization politics. He concludes that while America is a hegemon, perhaps they are a benevolent one.

The following works, which construct the power imbalance of the American hegemony in terms of military might frame the larger debate of the American foreign policy strategy during this time, additionally, they form the basis of what would come to be known as the Bush Doctrine. Yet by giving America the name of “empire” in political discourse, the neoconservative pundits achieved something many critics had been trying to circumvent for

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<sup>29</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. "Imperial by Design."

<sup>30</sup> Ignatieff, “Empire Lite,” 16.

<sup>31</sup> Ignatieff, “Empire Lite,” 32 and 59.

decades, the idea that the exceptionalism of the United States made it so unique and special in the eyes of history that it could not be compared to anything that had come before it. Now, with a name to identify it, the American Empire could be compared and ridiculed.<sup>32</sup>

Francis Fukuyama, for his part in the intellectual neoconservative debate, connects the legacy of neoconservatism and the defining factor of the Bush years in office as the Bush Doctrine, resting on a policy agenda that “involved concepts like regime change, benevolent hegemony, unipolarity, preemption, and American exceptionalism.”<sup>33</sup> Applied almost exclusively to the Middle East, the Bush Doctrine relied on the continued superiority of American military technology<sup>34</sup> and the main objective of pursuing unilateral US military interests abroad.<sup>35</sup> Mearsheimer, building from these early constructed foundations, notes that the global dominance of the United States was built on two key policy points: ensuring the US remained the most dominant power in the international system, and the active promotion and spread of western liberal democracy.<sup>36</sup>

Tied to the early imperial roots of the British Empire, control of the greater Middle East region was considered absolutely essential for the economic, military, and political control of the globe.<sup>37</sup> With unipolarity a driving component of the Bush Doctrine, control of global resources was critical. The possibility of a renewed pan-African state or some other regional hegemony threatened this foreign policy objective. The War on Terror became a circular reinforcement of the Bush Doctrine’s policies of American global hegemony and this agenda mandated preventing American enemies from threatening this hegemony.

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<sup>32</sup> Cox, "Empire, Imperialism and the Bush Doctrine."

<sup>33</sup> Fukuyama, "After the Neocons," 3.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis, Bernard. "Rethinking the Middle East."

<sup>35</sup> Fukuyama, "After the Neocons," 3.

<sup>36</sup> Mearsheimer, "Imperial by Design," 19.

<sup>37</sup> Harvey, "The New Imperialism," 20 and Lewis, "Rethinking the Middle East," 111.

The very idea of a hegemon was born from a specific historical reading of international relations history and interpreted as a means of global stability, a necessity for the type of long-term globally sustained order that was sought after. In detailing the history of the rise of the global liberal hegemon after the collapse of the USSR Michael Cox asks, "under conditions where Washington began to be compared with increasing regularity to a new Rome, why feel bound at all by the traditional rules of the international game?"<sup>38</sup> The *Bush Doctrine* can be directly traced to this line of thinking.

Both Fukuyama and Ignatieff characterize the American empire as that of a benevolent hegemon, rising from the fall of the Soviet Union and destined to spread western liberal democracy across the globe. This idea, is not new, but resurrected from the neoconservative legacy of the 1990s, and the idea that the US military can and should assert a benevolent hegemonic presence over strategically important parts of the world.<sup>39</sup> Fukuyama notes the idea of the benevolent hegemony succinctly when he states that it "rests on a belief in American exceptionalism that most non-Americans simply find not credible."<sup>40</sup> Even more pointedly, he asserts that "even benevolent hegemonies sometimes have to act ruthlessly when they need a staying power."<sup>41</sup>

Underpinning the ability to name an empire, is the cognitive structure that supplies the empire the ability to create a social and biological hierarchy - the Manichaeic worldview. Roger Mac Ginty, in his analysis of the rise of stabilization as a replacement for peace, points to Manichaeism, or the us versus them binary, as the grounding point for modern domination. This

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<sup>38</sup> Cox, "Empire, Imperialism and the Bush Doctrine," 596.

<sup>39</sup> Fukuyama, "After the Neocons," 95.

<sup>40</sup> Fukuyama, "After the Neocons," 111.

<sup>41</sup> Fukuyama, "After the Neocons," 113.

worldview relies on “oppositional binaries to understand social phenomenon”<sup>42</sup> as well as makes persuasive arguments for international policy. While this mode of thinking dominated specifically during the time of the Cold War, many international theorist including Mac Ginty believed it to have waned from public discourse after the fall of the Soviet Union. However, this paper argues that the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> was a reigniting moment for the Manichaeian worldview which would manifest itself within the language of the War on Terror.<sup>43</sup>

This discussion ties directly into the foundational level of what is imperial. As will be explored more in this paper, the imperial minimum requires a special component that is upheld by force – often at war – as well as a worldview that supplies oppositional binaries on which to rely. Empires are constructed in opposition to the frontier and are in constant motion to eliminate more and more of the frontier.<sup>44</sup> Maier’s construction pushes back against the notion that an empire *must* acquire physical lands in order to be classified as such, and creates a definitional opportunity to explore the broader scope of what historically and looking forward, what an empire was and can be.

### **C. International Aid and State-building**

Building on the long-standing work surrounding state-building and the relatively recent literature focused on the decolonization of international relations, scholarly work has more recently begun questioning which parties benefit from global aid structures and explicitly the global state-building infrastructure.<sup>45</sup> Questioning the power structures behind international aid

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<sup>42</sup> Mac Ginty, Roger, “Against Stability,” 22.

<sup>43</sup> Mac Ginty, Roger, “Against Stabilization,” 22.

<sup>44</sup> Maier, Charles, “Empire’s Past... Empire’s Future,” 10.

<sup>45</sup> Cooke, Bill, “From Colonial Administration;” Gissequist, Rachel, “Introduction: Aid and Institution-Building;” Jackson, “Security Sector Reform;” Rubin, Barnett, “Peace Building and State-Building.”

and the intentions of its objectives is critical in the examination of Empire building. Former President George Bush himself makes the connection to the idea that international aid can be used as a tool to further an agenda and applied it willingly around the world. In his West Point Commencement speech not long after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks noting, “In our development aid, in our diplomatic efforts, in our international broadcasting, and in our educational assistance, the United States will promote moderation and tolerance and human rights.”<sup>46</sup>

Development as a discipline is anchored within the Western economy, and therefore is reproduced within that power structure.<sup>47</sup> This reality has developed over the course of several decades beginning after the Second World War. The creation of vast international institutional and networks has furthered and perpetuated the system of domination (such organizations as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Organization which are both historically run by Western or Western educated leadership) – by defining what is *modernity*, what economic policies *should* be, and how government *should* be run – the system of international organizations has repeatedly removed the agency of the (re)constructing country and instead created a linear functionality of what a country *should* be.<sup>48</sup> Rachel Gisselquist’s study on the application of aid yields similar conclusions. Her study concludes that aid can alter formal state institutional structures by incentivizing countries to adopt policies and organizations that look like those in developed countries even if they may not function like them in practice.<sup>49</sup> Scholars like Barnett Rubin, Bill Cooke, Rachel Gissequist, Arturo Escobar, and Paul Jackson focus on the international model and look more broadly at the economic and government structures these missions create and sustain. These lines of inquiry interrogate not only the effectiveness of the

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<sup>46</sup> West Point Commencement, 2002.

<sup>47</sup> Gregory, “The Colonial Preset,” 22.

<sup>48</sup> Gregory, “The Colonial Preset,” 24.

<sup>49</sup> Gisselquist, “Introduction: Aid and Institution-Building in Fragile States,” 11.



aid and the ways in which it is being distributed but also its intention. While billions of dollars every year are funneled through the global humanitarian complex there has been little improvement in the long-term crisis of state-building facing the global community. State-building efforts have historically been targeted at so-called failed states in order to stabilize countries and ultimately produce secure nations. To this end, there is no definitive definition of what a failed state is, however, common characteristics are generally agreed upon in the international community which include:

lack of authority or control over the whole of its territory and a lack of monopoly over the legitimate use of violence; persistent weak institutions and governance systems that often lack leadership, state capacity and/or political will to fulfill essential state functions, especially in terms of providing basic services to the poor.<sup>50</sup>

State-building interventions have been notoriously ineffective and have failed at achieving the most basic of operational goals set out.<sup>51</sup> The United States Institute for Peace's Special Report on Afghanistan found: small improvements to security unrelated to troop placement, unrealistic expectations were created for Afghan people by large programs, these same programs were even more vulnerable to corruption and violence, and ultimately found that evidence was inconsistent when examining any relationship between the programs implemented and support for government or anti-government elements.<sup>52</sup> Global aid's preoccupation with the determinization of how the Third World is governed and the subsequent attempt to control how they are ruled is a defining feature of imperialism.<sup>53</sup> Placed within historical context, Rubin notes that the historical record is rife with examples of stronger powers intervening in their peripheries to create forms of order and have relied on a juridical framework that institutionalized an unequal legal status for

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<sup>50</sup> Menocal, Alina Rocha. "State Building for Peace."

<sup>51</sup> Paris, Roland. "Saving Liberal Peacebuilding."

<sup>52</sup> Kapstein, Ethan B. "Aid and Stabilization in Afghanistan."

<sup>53</sup> Cooke, "From Colonial Administration," 15.

different people<sup>54</sup> – aid has followed a similar pattern being distributed where rising tension may bleed into great power borders or threaten the periphery’s stabilization.

When thinking about the inefficiency of aid operation, in line with questions derived from the critical post-coloniality, one must wonder why local ownership has not risen to the forefront of international efforts to build strong and effective states? After decades of data and the collective experience of the global humanitarian aid network, the post-conflict state-building apparatus has continued to use a similar set of plans in every conflict. These set of blueprints include functions that can be broadly collected into two categories: Political and economic. Politically, state-building has sought to transform political systems through democratization and create a robust central government that has a monopoly over violence. This process of democratization often includes reforms in the security and public sector following a new constitution. Similarly, economic plans focus on neoliberal market growth through the deregulation of the market, privatization, removing subsidies, lowering trade barriers, cutting social programs and weak labor protections to list only a few. Mathew Hill goes further, describing the blue print approach as a functionality of the bureaucracy of the aid agencies that implement these programs.<sup>55</sup> He concludes that the homogenous aspect of both contractors and program plans is reinforced by this bureaucracy and continues to reproduce its sameness and the inequalities that come with it.

Yet data shows this method (as outlined above) is not only inefficient in stopping violence it actually supports engrained structures and often leads to higher levels of corruption.<sup>56</sup> International interventions that institute new governance mechanisms rely on international

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<sup>54</sup> Rubin, Barnett R. "Peace Building and State-Building in Afghanistan," 177.

<sup>55</sup> Hill, Matthew Allan. "Exploring USAID's Democracy Promotion," 102.

<sup>56</sup> Murtazashvili, Jennifer, "A Tired Cliché."

expertise and control, often creating tensions with local traditions, alienating the local population.<sup>57</sup> In these instances, long-term goals are carried out in contradiction to short term imperatives.<sup>58</sup> It is often through these large scale aid policies that intended goals backfire, creating dependencies or trustee relationships that foster animosity towards the international presence in the country.<sup>59</sup> Far worse, Escobar points to the specific root of this problem, identifying Western models that are put in place to produce and reproduce global and local power inequities.<sup>60</sup> Despite the liberalization of the economy and democratization of the political system that has utilized billions of global dollars, Afghanistan is still one of the world's poorest countries, the gender divide has not been tackled, and there continues to be widespread corruption and violence.<sup>61</sup>

Directly connected to Escobar's critique by prioritizing only Western models in Afghanistan, the aid community created parallel governing structures to the official central government that manifested as local councils. While the assumption that this would provide the central government a foothold in rural areas, establishing a governance structure more in-line with Western ideals was an expensive and inefficient alternative to traditional authority structures that already existed and were functioning.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, these parallel structures undermine the confidence of the Afghan citizens in the government's ability to deliver essential services. While donor assistance is given to large priority programs at the central government level, the execution of the service was contracted out to third parties, often with little to no oversight, and as that donor funding dried up the "capacity" that had been generated in the

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<sup>57</sup> Paris, "Saving Liberal Peacebuilding."

<sup>58</sup> Paris, Roland and Timothy Sisk, "The Dilemmas of Statebuilding," 3.

<sup>59</sup> Paris, Roland and Timothy Sisk, "The Dilemmas of Statebuilding," 6.

<sup>60</sup> Escobar, Arturo, "Imagining a Post-Development Era?" 22.

<sup>61</sup> See Government of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan's Millennium Development Goals," 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Murtazashvili, Jennifer, "A Tired Cliché," 21.

parallel system also decreased, leaving essential services to fall by the wayside.<sup>63</sup> This cyclical pattern eroded public trust not only in the central government's ability to provide for communities farthest from the capital but also in the aid organizations and countries that were working in remote villages.

Relying on this literature and pursuing to push this analytical framework forward, I will place the case of Afghanistan within this three-pronged nexus outlined above. While critics discredit the conception of a land-less empire, I argue that in the new age of empire the territorial pursuit lies in the conquest of culture and assets. Gone are the days of land-grabbing and a clear cut metropole. This construction relies on the Other to survive, the colony and the frontier. Instead, this model has been replaced by such an extreme example of hegemon that it goes beyond the traditional definition. Instead, I argue, it utilizes the Manichaeian World view's foundational framework to carve the world up along cultural lines, ensuring the hierarchical arrangement of the West (America) over the rest.

#### **IV. Method**

Critical discourse analysis provides a framework around language that ultimately seeks to discover the structural power dynamics (hierarchies and even domination) that language illuminates. By using discourse analysis and coding the language used in George W. Bush's speeches and the *Afghanistan Papers* against a set of questions, I aim to analyze the language that officials from the highest levels of government and aid practitioners use to discuss the work outputs and goals set in Afghanistan. I will use individual words and key phrases as my level of analysis within the larger works of President George W. Bush's speeches after September 11,

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<sup>63</sup> Murtazashvili, Jennifer, "Pathologies of Centralized State-Building," 63.

2001 and the *Afghanistan Papers* – seeking to identify roots in the imperialist tradition and supported by the Manichaeic worldview, in their assumptions and beliefs. Using the conceptual framework of decoloniality as my paradigmatic lens, I seek to explore and unmask the depth of imperialist intentions, relations, and outcomes.

I utilize Fukuyama’s description of the Bush Doctrine and concomitant foreign policy agenda that Fukuyama defined as “regime change, benevolent hegemony, unipolarity, preemption, and American exceptionalism.”<sup>64</sup> Fukuyama also highlights the strength of the doctrinal record left by the Bush Administration. I will use this extensive record of speeches post-September 11<sup>th</sup> to show a continuity of language that establishes a colonial reality. These documents include: President Bush Addresses a Joint Session of Congress (September 2001), Remarks by the President Upon Arrival (September 2001), President Bush’s Address at the Citadel (December 2001), State of the Union (SOTU) Address to the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress (January 2002), President Bush’s Address at West Point Commencement (June 2002), State of the Union Address to the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress (January 2003), President Bush Addresses the Nation (March 2003), and President Bush Announces Major Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended (May 2003). In addition, I will evaluate a Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) interview from 2015 and which was part of a release of documents from the Washington Post’s collection called the *Afghanistan Papers*. This paper will be identified by the interviewees redacted indicator number.

While coding and reviewing the primary texts I will be seeking to define (1) if the language used by the United States about Afghanistan assumes a cultural primacy (2) how the United States government defines and categorizes its role in Afghanistan. Based on these

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<sup>64</sup> Fukuyama, “After the Neocons,” 3.

questions I have established two different coding mechanisms, culture and hegemony. These categories, derived from the decolonization literature that has been extensively reviewed here, are the manifestations of the “new” imperialism. By seeking to define the concept of cultural primacy this study is looking to anchor the United States outside the realm of non-biased international actor but instead one that has a cultural agenda focused on supremacy. This is discursively anchored within the Manichean world view. Additionally, as a second category of analyzing the US as a hegemon I am seeking to determine if they were a leading and major power that was capable of directing the global political machine. Taken together, these two categories anchor this analysis within the historical context of empire while acknowledging the changes that have occurred in the world system and how an empire can manifest itself in present time.

By analyzing the above set of questions and preceding coding against the modality of imperialism I seek to illuminate the language choices United States officials chose to use while discussing the mission in Afghanistan. My analysis will show that the choice of words and key phrases used around the discussion of culture and the United States’ ‘liberating’ role indicate that practitioners and elected officials were carrying out imperial actions.

## V. Analysis

By asking a different set of questions, I am looking for a different set of answers. This analysis is not driven by *success* markers – if democracy has been established or if there is “peace” – but rather, how the intentions, motivations, and perceptions of the United States about itself and its relationship to Afghanistan affected the invasion that took place after 9/11. These questions drive to the heart of the concept of the new American Empire. The section is broken

down into two sub-sections based on my methodological coding of President Bush's speeches. I will first examine the idea of American cultural primacy, how the United States portrayed Afghanistan and Afghans and how this portrayal created a distinct difference between the two societies with a clear hierarchy of superiority and inferiority. I will then discuss how these constructions granted American policy makers access to define themselves as a benevolent hegemon and dictated the need for such a domination in the world. This section will look introspectively at the US's own perceived role and how based on this analysis the United States saw itself as not only a liberator but *needed* in order for Afghanistan to progress into modernity – America as the great savior.

The premise of the United States' power lies in its ability to dictate the terms of globalization and modernity. There is a long standing historical record of US President's speeches and a pattern of defining modernity. This pattern first identifies those who are not 'modern,' and then dictates a plan to pull them, kicking and screaming, if it must, into *our* modernity.<sup>65</sup> In extending this tradition to the examination of President George W. Bush's speeches, we find a similar pattern, tone and tenor. Modernity is constructed as a linear progression, defined by key features of secularization, free markets, technology and liberal democracy. This construction of modernity suggests that all societies are to progress on a linear trajectory, those who are deemed backwards and primitive are therefore expected to develop into the realm of advanced society. The expectation of a global norm defined by these characteristics underpins the Bush construction of an enemy that is fundamentally at odds (at war) with the idea of what is America.

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<sup>65</sup> Escobar, Arturo, "Imagining a Post-Development Era?" 23.

It is the oppositional binaries that Mac Ginty highlights, “good versus evil, rational versus irrational, and modern versus traditional”<sup>66</sup> that underpin the arguments for the War on Terror and the American role in the world. This analysis will focus directly on the subjective defining of the separation of cultures and the construction of development aid as an apparatus of power that President George W. Bush uses to build the intellectual infrastructure and consensus needed to invade Afghanistan but also to substantiate the global War on Terror.

### **A. Cultural Supremacy**

President Bush defines the Taliban as a backward people. He refers to their dwellings as "caves," using this as the initial illustration of what defines the War on Terror as us (civilization) and them (barbarians).<sup>67</sup> The oppositional binary is formed in two prongs; cultural supremacy and secularization.

President Bush constructs a cultural binary that relies on the comparison between America and any country the War on Terror brings American military power to, thus enabling the wholesale exportation of domination wherever it may be needed. This construction is tethered to Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* main thesis. Aside from his position as a Harvard Professor, Huntington directly impacted Neoconservative thinking at the time, holding such prominent positions as Director of Security Planning, National Security Council, and founder of the right wing journal *Foreign Policy*. This direct impact can be seen when tracing his main thesis to the construction of the Bush Doctrine,

The fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups

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<sup>66</sup> Mac Ginty, “Against Stabilization,” 22.

<sup>67</sup> Gregory, "The Colonial Present," 11.



of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.<sup>68</sup>

This line of thinking is the most deeply embedded ideological construct deployed by President Bush. Illustrated in his speech to a joint session of Congress immediately following the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, Bush describes how American values are under attack globally. He goes on to say, “freedom itself is under attack.” Saving freedom and American values are part of the mission, “Afghanistan's people have been brutalized — many are starving and many have fled,” he continues to list the barbaric laws in place, “women are not allowed to attend school. You can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough.”<sup>69</sup> Connecting directly to Huntington’s thesis of *Clash of Civilizations*, this analysis descends directly from the Manichaeic world-view lineage which similarly relies on opposing binaries.

A long history of ideological tension exists between the West and Islam highlighted by Huntington identifying the dual role of the West as both the peak of power but also the driver for non-western civilizations to return to their roots.<sup>70</sup> It is the most fundamental construction of the us versus them Manichean worldview that drives the imperial projection of the United States during its history and to its full expression during this period. Another influential neoconservative scholar, Bernard Lewis, makes a similar distinction. Having been credited with reviving the idea of the inferiority of the Islamic world<sup>71</sup> he also advised Bush cabinet members including Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and President Bush himself. His works are particularly relevant, noting that cultural alliances are out of reach

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<sup>68</sup> Huntington, “Clash of Civilization,” 22.

<sup>69</sup> *President Bush Addresses a Joint Session of Congress*, 2001.

<sup>70</sup> Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” 26.

<sup>71</sup> See König, Daniel (2015). "Arabic-Islamic Records." *Arabic-Islamic Views of the Latin West: Tracing the Emergence of Medieval Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 21.

between the West and the Arab world as there does not exist enough relevant cultural ties to which they can become bonded.<sup>72</sup> Lewis adds to Huntington's line of thinking in his most famous work, *Roots of Muslim Rage*, writing that the West is a driver for non-west civilizations when he writes of the "surge of hatred in the Muslim world that becomes a rejection of Western civilization as such," and he adds "Islam, like other religions, has also known periods when it inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence...that hatred is directed against us."<sup>73</sup> The influence of both Huntington and Lewis is evident in Bush's speech on September 20<sup>th</sup>, "This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom."<sup>74</sup>

In both his 2002 and 2003 State of the Union's, Bush relies on America's self-identified image synonymous with freedom. In 2002 he ends his speech declaring, "our enemies send other people's children on missions of suicide and murder. They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed." And that in contrast, "we stand for a different choice, made long ago, on the day of our founding. We affirm it again today. We choose freedom and the dignity of every life."<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in 2003 he declared, "whatever the duration of this struggle, and whatever the difficulties, we will not permit the triumph of violence in the affairs of men – free people will set the course of history."<sup>76</sup> Bush paints the War on Terror as a fight over freedom, the need to see the light of American liberty shine across the globe and illuminate the universal morals that he claims span all time and peoples.

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<sup>72</sup> Lewis, "Rethinking the Middle East."

<sup>73</sup> Lewis, Bernard, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," 48.

<sup>74</sup> *Presidential Address to the Nation*, 2001.

<sup>75</sup> *State of the Union Address*, 2002.

<sup>76</sup> *State of the Union Address*, 2003.

In Bush's January 2002 State of the Union Address he asked Congress to "join a new effort to encourage development and education and opportunity in the Islamic world."<sup>77</sup> He parallels this analogy one year later at his State of the Union in 2003. After over a year of formal occupation he declares, "in Afghanistan, we helped liberate an oppressed people. And we will continue helping them secure their country, rebuild their society, and educate their children."<sup>78</sup> His linguistic pattern of calling for help – to save the women and children through the grace of the American way is strung throughout his time in office. Bush draws direct connections between Islamic religiosity and undereducated populations and backwardness that needs to be made right. In his speech in 2002 at the West Point Commencement he identifies part of the gravest danger to freedom as "radicalism" and returns again to the idea of educating populations into "moderation and tolerance and human rights."<sup>79</sup>

President Bush's West Point Commencement speech is thickly woven with language meant to define America in direct opposition to Afghanistan – indoctrinating the next generation of American military personnel into the Manichaeian worldview that dominated the *Bush Doctrine*. He describes America's enemies as "totalitarians, holding a creed of power with no place for human dignity... [who] seek[s] to impose a joyless conformity, to control every life and all of life."<sup>80</sup> Bush states this more directly later saying, "we are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name."<sup>81</sup> But Bush continues by declaring America and its allies that of the civilized world "united by common dangers of terrorist violence and

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<sup>77</sup> *State of the Union, 2002.*

<sup>78</sup> *State of the Union, 2003.*

<sup>79</sup> *West Point Commencement, 2002.*

<sup>80</sup> *West Point Commencement, 2002.*

<sup>81</sup> *West Point Commencement, 2002.*

chaos,”<sup>82</sup> indirectly insinuating that those who do not ally with the United States in its War on Terror are not part of the civilized world, and therefore must lie within the violence and chaos.

These tensions lie at the base of the assumption of cultural supremacy, Bush articulates a clear distinction between those that subscribe to his “universal ideals” and the rest (the enemy). He reiterates this by connecting America to civilization, “more and more, civilized nations find themselves on the same side – united by common dangers of terrorist violence and chaos.”<sup>83</sup>

President Bush constructs a second binary that connects the Muslim faith to that of squalid backwardness and establishes an entry point for American intervention in order to 'save' Afghan women and the larger population from the grip of radicalized religious authoritarian terror. In Former President Bush’s speech at The Citadel he spoke of an ideological divide that was closing between allies and yet across this divide “are bands of murders, supported by outlaw regimes” he goes on to outline their movement as being defined by “hatred” of “progress, and freedom, and choice, and culture, and music, and laughter, and women.”<sup>84</sup> In another speech he again establishes the cultural superiority that American will bring to the Afghan people, “the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America.”<sup>85</sup> Ultimately, his language calls for protection of America’s “superior” values against the “barbaric” ones abroad in Afghanistan.

The obvious weakness here is captured by Shampa Biswas who identifies religion as the random arbiter of difference even within liberal orders and cannot comport fundamentally with the workings of its structural power.<sup>86</sup> This observation has not deterred Western countries from

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<sup>82</sup> *West Point Commencement*, 2002.

<sup>83</sup> *West Point Commencement*, 2002.

<sup>84</sup> *Address at the Citadel*, 2001.

<sup>85</sup> *Presidential Address to the Nation*, 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair, et al., "Power, Postcolonialism, and International Relations," 186.

tying secularization to that of modernity. Take, for example, the US separation of church and state or France's ban on religious face coverings in public government buildings, with other European nations implementing similar legislation. In all of these cases, the legislation started with a claim that these 'medieval' practices violated women's human rights and, therefore, the use of aggressive tactics to pursue secularization and *modernity* were justified - the new Empire can claim that these actions serve the cause of moral universalism.<sup>87</sup> But the claim of moral universalism is also dubious. We know this to be a falsehood and a manipulation of definitions and political public relations construction.<sup>88</sup>

In practice, solidifying the Muslim faith not only as backward but as incompetent of functioning and ruling itself, of producing a population educated by modern standards that looks to secularization, President Bush paints a picture to the American people, that steeped within the religion and culture of the Afghan people is the need for American intervention and reformation. He draws on the analogy of the crusade to root his moral justification of the invasion to the American people saying, "This is a new kind of - a new kind of evil. And we understand. And the American people are beginning to understand. This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while. And the American people must be patient. I'm going to be patient."<sup>89</sup>

This language portrays the Other as evil, dark, backwards, uneducated, and without freedom. The power of this construction of the Other lies in the ambiguity, it is not ultimately not prescribed to a particular sect or people but left amorphous in order to apply to all who are seen as anti-modern and anti-liberal. In this way, the demarcation really separates those who do not love American life and modernity as the enemy. President Bush paints America as the savior that

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<sup>87</sup> Ignatieff, "Empire Lite," 110.

<sup>88</sup> See Chowdry, Geeta and Sheila Nair, et al. (2002); Harvey, David (2003); and Gregory, David (2004).

<sup>89</sup> *Remarks by the President Upon Arrival*, 2001.

upholds the greatest of moral values that can be achieved in this world and the standard bearer of what is right. This form of language and influence, having been deployed on the most global stage, reproduces the form and function of power that is derived from the earliest Western empires. The universalist application of this power, to define freedom and democracy and moral value, through the Western world is another layer to the Western universalist dialogue within the cultural pluralism of Western culture. It cements the supremacy of the West as a whole in contrast to the Other.

Yet, all of these methods outlined above and the historical moment of September 11<sup>th</sup> as identified here, brings us to a precipice. The tools that were deployed over the course of the American story, learning from its Western neighbors how to avoid failure and how to deploy its hegemony, effectively created a moment to be seized. The legacy of the British Empire bleeds through this historical reconstruction of the theoretical application of dominance.

## **B. Benevolent Hegemony**

The term benevolent hegemon, draws directly from the colonial narrative and descends from a legacy of domination and interventions built around the ideas that “we” must help the Other to transform into “us.” The attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> was not just a catalyzing moment for the US, but also created increased attention and connection between underdevelopment and security concerns, some saw potential for spill-over from failed states into stable states that would lead to increased global instability and terrorism.<sup>90</sup> This calculation inevitably ends with the determination that the Global South needs America (the bearer of democracy) to deploy

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<sup>90</sup> Menocal, Alina Rocha, "State Building for Peace," 1719.

development to create the mechanisms within which to enter the so-called historical stream of modernity.

The construction of the Other cemented the moral need for the United States to bring peace which then created the dialectic of the benevolent hegemon. This revelation brings Fukuyama's warning back, that even benevolent hegemonies may be ruthless when their global power is in danger. While over the past several decades, the US has relied on the liquidation of any global opposition – supporting state terrorism where convenient and deploying the CIA and special forces to operate where national interest may find themselves - allowing this to persist, the global powers turned the other cheek.<sup>91</sup> Without the events at 9/11, the global stage may not have been set for America to declare its intentions without global resistance. Given the shock to the Western World, these events caused, the major European blocks supported the United States and therefore opened the proverbial door for the nation to walk through, unchecked. Michael Ignatieff makes this moment salient, suggesting that we, "call it peacekeeping or nation-building, call it what you like, imperial policing is what is going on... in fact, America's entire War on Terror is an exercise in imperialism."<sup>92</sup>

It is through this lens, we should view development as another tool used by the West to link forms of knowledge about the Third World and the reproduction of knowledge and power that frame and map the Third World without the voices or perspectives of local participants or leaders.<sup>93</sup> In essence, development has become a euro-centric road map of how to create a nation without every acknowledging the nation.<sup>94</sup> By the late nineteenth century, the rise of post-conflict societies were increasing, and so too was the power of the United States. By this time,

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<sup>91</sup> Harvey, "The New Imperialism," 38.

<sup>92</sup> Ignatieff, "Empire Lite," 79.

<sup>93</sup> Escobar, "Imagining a Post-Development Era?" 23.

<sup>94</sup> Escobar, "Imagining a Post-Development Era?" 22.

the US had learned to mask its new form of imperialism under the guise of a "spaceless universalization of its own values, buried within a rhetoric that was ultimately to culminate in globalization."<sup>95</sup> This tactic, coupled with the infrastructure built within the new "state-building" narrative, allowed for the West to dominate the post-conflict space – parachuting both their ideas and their people all over the world. This structure, built around the idea of who *should* rule and who *should not*, concludes that those who fall into the *should not* category are therefore in need of saving and ruling.<sup>96</sup>

We see this pattern distinctly across the many speeches of George W. Bush after September 11<sup>th</sup>. In December of the same year, speaking at the Citadel in South Carolina, President Bush ended his speech by saying, “the course we follow is a matter of profound consequence to many nations. If America wavers, the world will lose heart. If America leads, the world will show its courage. America will never waiver. America will lead the world to peace.”<sup>97</sup> Bush directly equates the success and the peace of the world to American leadership, suggesting that the hope for the future must be placed in American hands, without it, there is no hope of peace. While this speech comes just a month before his first State of the Union speech after the events of 9/11, the SOTU speech in 2002 lays out his intentions much more clearly.

Standing in front of a joint session of Congress in 2002, towards the end of his speech the President declares, “we have glimpsed what a new culture of responsibility could look like. We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self. We’ve been offered a unique opportunity, and we must not let this moment pass.” There is direct acknowledgement that the moment of the overt-American empire would not be possible without the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, but also that

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<sup>95</sup> Harvey, "The New Imperialism," 47.

<sup>96</sup> Cooke, "From Colonial Administration," 15.

<sup>97</sup> *Address at the Citadel*, 2001.



it is a unique moment for America to step onto the global stage as an unparalleled leader and cement its power. Giving voice to this reality he continues, “and we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world towards the values to lasting peace.”<sup>98</sup> Implicit here are which values and whose values he is referring to. As referenced earlier, the linguistic mapping of the “other” creates the entry point needed to define America in terms of its opposition to the other and therefore as the solution to what it has defined as a global problem. The global problem is defined in terms of both terrorism and territorialization that became interchangeable; and the solution that is proposed, relies on the interchangeable terms of American values and American leadership. His ultimate conclusion in 2002, “we will see freedom’s victory.”<sup>99</sup>

Shortly after September 11<sup>th</sup> George Bush began this project of mapping out Others within the borders of Afghanistan and later Iraq. He achieves this by demarcating the world into the axis of evil and axis of good. Gregory identifies this type of mapping as “a cartography designed to bring relief to ‘us’ while bringing ‘them’ *into* relief; at once a therapeutic and a vengeful gesture, its object was to reveal the face of the other *as* other.”<sup>100</sup> This methodology of defining and othering the people of Afghanistan as barbaric, as backward and in need of saving follows a long history of colonial modalities whereby those who wield power also are the producers and distributors of knowledge about others. Defining who we are and who they are. In America’s classification of Afghanistan as a failed state, the administration further constructed this cartography fixed on territorialization in order to substitute one for the other – Afghanistan with terrorism. A SIGAR interview with LL-01 reveals that the binary and backwards construction of Afghanistan Bush was trying to create was succeeding. The redacted interviewee

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<sup>98</sup> *State of the Union*, 2002.

<sup>99</sup> *State of the Union*, 2002.

<sup>100</sup> Gregory, “The Colonial Present,” 49.

notes, “after 9/11 people had the cliché view of Afghanistan of an ungovernable, horrific place, never-been ruled, tribes, violence, all this kind of thing.”<sup>101</sup> The cultural construction was affected far beneath the top leadership to the practitioners on the ground and the American people.

He does not stop here however and tells Congress in 2003 that “our discoveries in Afghanistan confirmed our worst fears, and showed us the true scope of the task ahead.”<sup>102</sup> This was built from the foundation of the cultural superiority of Americans and the west. By extension this provided the ultimate need for America to act as the benevolent hegemon in its relationship with Afghans and the broader Muslim world as the WoT ramped up. While Bush claims “moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place,”<sup>103</sup> he constructs a very clear moral difference between the West and Afghanistan – he relies on the dichotomy of presenting the idea of a moral universalism being natural and right and undermining this logic with the presentation of the contradictions that the Muslim moral constitution creates. In this view he believed that “we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward values that will bring lasting peace.”<sup>104</sup>

The use of force, and the violent destruction of land and people to achieve a peace for those who are America’s “friends” is not new. And while this statement may be true, what is equally true is this has been achieved at whatever cost necessary. While referring to sending Americans into battle as the most profound decision he can make, President Bush also acknowledges this reality, “we seek peace. We strive for peace. And sometimes peace must be defended... If war is forced upon us, we will fight in a just cause and by just means...And if war

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<sup>101</sup> LL-01-(b)(3), (b)(6),(b)(7)(C). SIGAR, 2015.

<sup>102</sup> *State of the Union*, 2002.

<sup>103</sup> *West Point Commencement*, 2002.

<sup>104</sup> *State of the Union*, 2002.

is forced upon us, we will fight with the full force and might of the United States military – and we will prevail.” Directly related to Huntington’s analysis of what the clash of civilizations will mean for the global competition for power, this struggle will not be contained to military or economic strength but will also encompass control of international organizations and the competition to dominate political and religious affiliations.<sup>105</sup>

In every global effort, where America has swooped in with its figurative super hero cap to save the day, Bush notes, “America’s purpose is more than to follow a process – it is to achieve a result: the end of terrible threats to the civilized world.”<sup>106</sup> It is critical to not overlook the end of his sentences, that these benefits should be felt by the “civilized world.” This is a world that he has already constructed and mapped so as to be formed far from the Afghan people and its borders, seemingly excluding them from the benefits of the peace that is being brought to the world at their own expense. A revisiting of the Manichean worldview – good versus evil, light versus dark – reveals the binary world constructed by the Bush administration and the actions taken in Afghanistan and later Iraq.

In his speech 2003 SOTU speech, Bush attempts to create parallels to other critical turning points in history citing “the ambitions of Hitlerism, militarism, and communism” all being defeated by “the will of free peoples, by the strength of great alliances, and by the might of the United States of America.”<sup>107</sup> The historical references, meant to align this moment to those of the most defining moments of past generations build momentum for the larger point – America is always on the *right* side of history. This nostalgia for the past to speak to the present is reminiscent of the language used to talk about the glory of the old Empires and should not be

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<sup>105</sup> Huntington, “Clash of Civilizations,” 29.

<sup>106</sup> State of the Union, 2003.

<sup>107</sup> *State of the Union*, 2003.

overlooked. President Bush nods to this historical comparison, “once again, this nation and all our friends are all that stand between a world at peace, and a world of chaos and constant alarm.”<sup>108</sup> Without America holding strong to the reins of power, by his calculation, the world would descend into the throws of chaos and the barbarism he has ascribed to the Afghan people and those of the ‘other.’ In the Bush administration’s view, the world was calling out for their help as much as they were desperate to give it, “once again we are called to defend the safety of our people, and the hopes of mankind. And we accept this responsibility.”<sup>109</sup> This noble vision of the benevolent hegemon, constructed from the historical parallels, is as Fukuyama reminds us, not always peaceful in its pursuit of peace.

## VI. Conclusion

This paper aims to critically analyze how President George W. Bush’s rhetoric has exposed the hidden empire of America after the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. By deeply examining a number of the President’s speeches, under the temporal frame of post-9/11, this paper was able to establish a pattern of dialect rooted in the imperialist tradition. Defining modernity by Western standards and dividing the world by their allegiance to America (god versus evil), Bush relies on the Manichaeic worldview that Huntington and Lewis expanded upon in their own writing and advising of his administration. The exposing of the American Empire was made possible by a confluence of factors: the attack on the American homeland and the compliance of other Western powers to the rise of the American hegemony. The historical moment of September 11<sup>th</sup> brought American foreign policy to a precipice, and acting upon that precipice drove the American Empire onto the world stage. The tools of establishing America as culturally superior over

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<sup>108</sup> *State of the Union*, 2003.

<sup>109</sup> *State of the Union*, 2003.

Afghanistan and defining its fledgling hegemony on the moral grounds of freedom and justice defined this moment from others in America's past.

Drawing from a different set of questions than normative studies on the US intervention in Afghanistan, this paper results in a different set of conclusions separated from determining if Afghanistan was a successful war or not. By relying on the wealth of decolonization literature and scholars already examining these questions more broadly, it is clear that the Bush Administration deployed a playbook built from the imperial past to dominate Afghanistan and its people.

Speaking to Congress and the American people in his 2003 State of the Union, President Bush declares, "This country has many challenges. We will not deny, we will not ignore, we will not pass along our problems to other Congresses, to other presidents, and other generations. We will confront them with focus and clarity and courage."<sup>110</sup> This resonates deeply within the context of the rising decolonization literature coming from the Western-world. It is crucial we begin to confront the very recent past and our collective history of actions and begin to acknowledge the implications they have on the global sociopolitical sphere.

This paper does not propose a set of solutions but is a continuation of work being compiled to strengthen the scholarly record. Further research and works should continue to critically examine American foreign policy within the lens of decoloniality. The spaces defined as Other continue to multiple, to stop the treadmill of the colonial present it is necessary to continue to ask a different set of questions.

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<sup>110</sup> *State of the Union*, 2003.

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