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IN DEFENSE OF EMPIRES

By Deepak Lal

Are empires good? Is America shirking its duty by not assuming responsibility for imposing order and free markets on the rest of the world? These provocative questions are raised by Deepak Lal, professor of international development studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, in a new essay entitled *In Defense of Empires* (AEI Press, 2005).

Lal deplors the fact that empires have acquired a bad name, not least in American politics. He views this as particularly unfortunate because empires have historically maintained peace and promoted prosperity. "Like other economically and militarily dominant powers in the past, the United States has acquired an empire, but it is reluctant to face the resulting imperial responsibilities," laments Lal. "Wishing the empire would just go away or could be managed by global love and compassion is to bury one's head in the sand and promote global disorder."

Lal's central argument in favor of empires is that they provide the most basic of public goods—order—among the anarchical society of states. They also facilitate a transnational legal system to protect property rights, particularly those of foreigners. And lastly, they quell ethnic conflicts.

Imperialism is precisely what is needed to restore order in the Middle East and to bring the world of Islam into the modern world without seeking to "alter its soul," Lal concludes. "The primary task of a Pax Americana must be to find ways to create a new order in the Middle East, where cosmological beliefs are preserved, [and] the prosperity resulting from modernity leads to the end of jihad."

In particular, says Lal, American power is needed for order. He observes that the need for empire arises because many governments are too weak to protect their people from internal enemies or outside intrusion. Lal is particularly concerned with the threat posed to both East and West by jihadist tendencies in the Muslim world. He especially singles out Saudi Arabian Wahabbism, which is spreading turmoil and hatred throughout the world, and the Saudis, who have funded the mosques and madrasas that preach hatred against the infidels—Jews, Christians, and Hindus. This poisoning of the Muslim mind clearly must stop, Lal concludes, if there is to be an end to the war on terror.

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