

Introduction: American Empire? The Role of the United States in the World Today¹

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DURING THE 2006 Spring General Meeting, four speakers addressed the question of America's role in the world. Their presentations were in the context of a debate over the nature of the world following the Cold War and the direction United States foreign policy should take at the onset of the twenty-first century. Some observers held that, as the sole remaining "superpower," the United States was obligated to take on an imperial role in the world for the sake of justice, freedom, and democracy. Others have argued that the United States must not succumb to the snares of "imperial overstretch" by taking on greater responsibilities than it can prudently bear.

Four speakers, two American and two European, addressed this question. Papers from three of the presentations, revised to reflect developments since April 2006, are presented here. Dr. Jessica Tuchman Mathews, director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C., also participated in the symposium. Her current views can be found in her article "Reinvigorate Nuclear Nonproliferation," in *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas* 6 (Fall 2007).

¹Read 29 April 2006.