

THE AMERICAN EMPIRE AND ITS EVENTUAL DEMISE

By Ed O'Rourke

The United States has had an empire for a long time. Despite all the public relations, empires exist only to benefit the rulers. Chalmers Johnson presents evidence for this evaluation in *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 356 pages). The American Empire has 5 global military commands, more than one million women and men on four continents, has a carrier battle group in each ocean, guarantees the survival of regimes in Iraq, South Korea, and Israel and dominates the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization.

The US Defense Department's 2005 Base Structure Report shows 737 military bases in foreign countries. With no given reason, the Report omits bases in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, and Uzbekistan.

Forty percent of the defense budget and the entire intelligence budget are secret to all but a handful of sympathetic congressmen. The result is an out of control military complex with intelligence agencies controlled exclusively by the President.

The Central Intelligence Agency's charter did not list clandestine or covert activities and yet they have become the CIA's main activity. Senator Frank Church described "covert action" as a "semantic disguise for murder, coercion, blackmail, bribery, the spreading of lies, and consorting with known torturers and international terrorists." The CIA's clandestine operations have worked to manipulate or undermine democratic governments. Its operations were essential in overthrowing democratic governments in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954) and Chile (1973).

The CIA has been defective in gathering intelligence. My feeling is that the CIA purposely inflated the military and economic might of the old Soviet Union to justify their

expanded budget along with that of the US armed forces. In 1989, I was reading about the obvious deterioration of the Soviet Army in the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*. The American media was totally oblivious of this development. During the Reagan administration, Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger stated that the Soviet Union had massive underground shelters ready to protect their citizens in a nuclear war. This was part of an effort to justify massive spending for a US Star Wars program. The underground shelters were probably all Soviet propaganda with no basis in fact. No one has even seen these shelters.

In 2003, the US intelligence agencies did not have a single agent in Iraq. Rather they relied on information from con men like Ahmad Chalabi. Critics had noted the notorious deficiency of having field agents over many decades.

The United States has exempted itself from international laws in Iraq and our political and military leaders are liability for war crimes. Article 54 (2) of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol 1) states, “It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as food-stuffs, agricultural areas for the production of food-stuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying their sustenance value to the civilian population or the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, or cause them to move away, or for any other motive.” During the Gulf War of 1991, the United States purposely destroyed the civilian infrastructure, including 18 of 20 electricity-generating plants, water-pumping, and sanitation systems which caused the outbreak of disease and high rates of child mortality.

The embargo imposed on Iraq after the Gulf War was one of the most comprehensive in history. It prohibited chlorine imports that would purify the water supply. Among numerous items that the United States prohibited from entering Iraq in the winter of 2001 were dialysis, dental and firefighting equipment, water tankers, milk and yogurt production equipment, and printing machines for schools.

All empires state that the people they control are getting a good deal. The Bush administration maintained that the US was bringing democracy to Iraq. Imperialists have always stated a higher purpose to their actions—divine right, racial superiority, manifest destiny, bringing Christianity, or a “civilizing mission” to mask barbarous behavior in other countries.

Most of these defenses have been out of fashion for a long time. Modern day imperialists tout the benefits of globalization, free trade, the rule of (foreign) law, liberation from a local tyranny, or democracy that are code words for exploitation of poor countries.

Almost all the countries under imperialistic rule in the 19th and 20th centuries remained “poor, disease- and crime-ridden, and at the mercy of a rigged international trading system” that was supposed to work to everyone’s advantage. Between 1747 and 1947, India’s per capita income was flat. In the second half of Queen Victoria’s reign, British misrule brought on famines and plagues that took the lives of 30 to 50 million Indians.

The British have been successful in that they were totally different from the French, Belgians, Dutch, Japanese, Germans, and Russians. Those who read novels or watch the television series *Masterpiece Theater* have the idea that they were “decent chaps”. The Kenyans would be surprised at this image. When they rebelled against ruthless land seizures by British settlers, the British detained, tortured, sodomized, castrated, and executed thousands. Imperialists’ defenders do not research the feelings of those ruled.

Chalmers Johnson sees a solution: “A grassroots movement to abolish the CIA, break the hold of the military-industrial complex, and establish public financing of elections.” Due to corporate control of the media and the difficulties of organizing a large diffuse population, he does not think this will happen.

The United States’ efforts to maintain an empire has diminished its domestic democracy eventually resulting in a military dictatorship or a softer, gentler civilian equivalent. What the Reichstag fire was to Nazi Germany, the 9/11 event was to the Bush Administration.

Johnson believes that “...the combination of huge standing armies, almost continuous wars, military Keynesianism, and ruinous military expenses have destroyed our republican structure in favor of an imperial presidency.” All previous empires have collapsed because of hubris and overstretch. Ours will be no exception.

Ed O’Rourke is an environmental accountant in Houston.

eorourke@pdq.net

www.edourke.com